

Sermon "Proper 22" - 5th October 2014

Preached by Revd Caroline Sackley at

La Chapelle Notre-Dame de Miséricorde", La Chapelle Palluau

The parable from today's reading is easily translated. The landowner represents God, the vineyard Israel. And it seems to be starting in a similar way to that of another story. In Isaiah 5: 1-7 we have the story of "The Vineyard of the Lord destroyed", which of course would have been well known to the people hearing this parable. It describes a vineyard being carefully prepared, even a watchtower was built to guard it, but the fruit produced was only wild grapes. God loved his vineyard and did all he could for it, but it did not bear the fruit he wanted and so the whole vineyard will be destroyed.

In that story, the fault lies with the vine, in Jesus story with the tenants, but with the same result, rebellion leads to fruitlessness, fruitlessness to judgement.

Jesus moves the story on and the prophets become part of the story, and they are violently abused. Finally, one in the line of the prophets, but even more, the Son, the Messiah is sent, with the inevitable result. Jesus is challenging, as ever, his hearers, asking them to search their scriptures, to understand what is happening. Jesus is telling them who he is, and also warning of his own death.

The Pharisees know what the owner of the vineyard should do to the tenants who killed his son, but they don't apply this to themselves.

Of course this is also a warning to us all. Because we go to church, work for the church we are not immune from falling into the trap of assuming, because we are following the 'rules' we are numbered in God's people.

Paul writes in his letter that he has more reasons to make assumptions about his standing with God than anybody. The only thing that can save him is a person. Jesus Christ. Christianity wasn't a religion for Paul. It was a person. The person who was shamefully rejected by his own, the one who loves more than we can imagine.

We have to ensure that we are not just following the rules, we are not just church attenders but Christians. Each and every day we have the responsibility of making a personal choice to follow Christ, to accept the filling of the Holy Spirit. We should not be law driven people but love driven people. People who love God with everything we have and love others as we are loved.

Paul, in his letter states his aim: to know the Messiah, to be found in him, to trust him, to share his sufferings and resurrection.

In the film 'Chariots of Fire' Eric Liddell's famous victory is shown. In the 440 yard race the athletes came round the first bend in a bunch and one got pushed over and off the track. Rather than giving up, this seemed to spur the runner on and coming from behind won the race. This is a real message for us, to put the past behind us and focus on Christ and winning the reward. It is also reassuring, because over the years of our relationship with Christ we will fall, get tempted from the straight track or get delayed and diverted by things. But we have been saved, Jesus died for us so that our sins will be forgiven. We are all running, walking, staggering or even crawling towards that winning post and the prize. We are all still travelling. We have to read further in Paul's letter to understand his view of the prize, its not going up to heaven, in verses 20 and 21 he speaks of Jesus coming from heaven to earth to transform the world and us, we are aiming to live in God's new world with our new bodies, like that of Jesus' glorified and resurrected one.

This is all not by our efforts though, we cannot boast about our religious achievements, however much the analogy of the race fits. It is all done by God's grace, we are responding to his love. This is the joy of being a Christian, we can rejoice in God and his love for us.

Going back to Isaiah chapter 28:16 ' So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, for a sure foundation: the one who trusts will never be dismayed"'.

Jesus sees himself as the cornerstone, one rejected by many but who will become the base of the future in God. However the stone that supports can also be a trip hazard or even an instrument of death. We are offered forgiveness and mercy now, but judgement later. We need to choose him now.

In choosing him, we are able to be forgiven, to have the opportunity to become the best we can, to fulfil God's intention for us, to know that despite the dark times that come from time to time, we will be able to rejoice in the Lord our God, knowing that he is walking beside us as we race towards him.