

### **Matthew 21:33-46**

*Jesus tells a story about a farmer who cultivates a vineyard and then rents it to tenant farmers, who, instead of giving the farmer his share of the fruit when it's due, kills his servants and then the farmer's son. In this way, he explains, God's reign is being given to those who will produce fruit.*

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

### **COCU 59A REFLECTIONS ON READINGS**

This week the central image is the Law, and on how some are excluded from God's life because they have allowed the Law to become stagnant, repressive and legalistic. The ones who end up excluded are those who use the law to exclude others. The result is less a judgement than a consequence. What a tragedy that the Law, which is designed to bring life, should become such a destructive idol. In the **Exodus** reading, the Israelites receive God's Law. Because of their fear, they choose a lifeless Law over a relationship to which the Law is simply a doorway. Here the Law ends up being an end in itself, rather than a means to an end - intimacy with God. In **Philippians** Paul, who could celebrate his righteousness under the law, expresses his disregard for legalistic purity, and embraces, rather, the life of Christ - both his resurrection and his suffering - for it is in Christ that he knows true life, and true connection with God and others. In Jesus' **parable**, it is the people of the law - the religious leaders, who are represented by the wicked tenants. Their inability to recognise their place as custodians of God's vineyard, and their unwillingness to receive the "farmer's son" reveals how their devotion to the law has robbed them and others of life, and has led them into a destructive legalism. In the **Psalms**, creation is shown to be simply a way in which God is revealed, and is a gift that brings life. (*John van de Laar, Sacredise*)

### **Psalms 19**

*A psalm celebrating creation which proclaims God's glory. God's law enlightens those who keep it. (The leader reads the Psalm and the people interpret it. Enjoy the beauty of the psalmist's poetry and make space for wonder).*

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

**Look to the mountains and see everlastingness...**

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

**Search both day and night and watch for the glory of it...**

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

**Listen to the silence and hear wonder speak...**

yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

**Look to the horizon to hear a word about eternity...**

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes out like a beloved from a wedding canopy,  
and like a strong athlete runs its course with joy.

**Look to the sunrise and enjoy God's forever-promise...**

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

**Look to the seasons and live God's rhythm...**

The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the decrees of God are sure, making wise the simple;

**Look to creation's order and accept its wisdom...**

the precepts of God are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of God is clear, enlightening the eyes;

**Look to justice and truth and feel their light...**

the fear of God is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of God are true and righteous altogether.

**Look to the word and recognise its call...**

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

**Look to God's commandments and taste their sweetness...**

Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

**Look to creation's order and know justice...**

But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

**Look to grace and know its forgiveness...**

Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.

**Look to what brings life and live its example...**

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

**Look to God's covenant and know its love...**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my redeemer.

**The heavens are telling the glory of God.** *(Roddy Hamilton)*

**Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20**

*The people of Israel are terrified by the thunder, lightning, smoke and trumpet sounds. They ask Moses to speak to God on their behalf, but Moses reassures them that God is simply keeping the people in awe so they don't sin.*

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will

not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour. When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

**Philippians 3: 4b-14**

*Paul, who has good reason for confidence under the law because of his upbringing and observance, values only the righteousness which he has received through Christ, and through which he knows the power of Christ's resurrection and participates in Christ's sufferings.*

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the 8th day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.