

## **10.00am Eucharist**

**Exodus 20.1-4, 7-9, 12-20**

**Philippians 3.4b-14, Matthew 21.33-end**

It is said that when Roman Commanders were driven through Rome in triumph after a great military victory or in the course of some other celebration a slave was positioned behind their head.

The slave's task was two fold:

to hold the laurel wreath over the head of the victor and to whisper in his ear continuously, *Memento Mori*, remember you are mortal.

Well, I don't want to put a dampener on this weekend of celebration and new beginnings, but our Scripture readings today do offer a similar note of caution!

While none of the servers is whispering in my ear (yet!) , the Holy Spirit is clearly at work in the parable of the vineyard this morning.

The vineyard is commonly used in the Bible as a metaphor for the land and the people God loves.

The task of caring for them has been entrusted over time to leaders, kings, priests and prophets who have fulfilled their vocation with various degrees of faithfulness and success.

Jesus tells this parable as a warning to the authorities of his own day, but it is just as relevant to us.

As Christians in this city and as the people of this cathedral, we have been given stewardship of fruitful possibilities planted in the gospel, in tradition, in the inheritance of land, buildings and people,

and the challenge of the parable is simple –

when Jesus returns and asks us to account for our stewardship, what will we say?

I believe that this is not just a question asked of me, as the latest Dean, important as that is, but a question for us as a community, entrusted with so much.

It will be my task in the next few weeks and months to discover what *you* think is most precious in this congregation, this building and its life, and where you think its fruitful possibilities lie.

We might take a leaf from Paul's letter, as he looks back and audits his past in the light of the revelation of Christ and the prize of the Kingdom that he sees ahead of him.

This follows a dramatic change of viewpoint for Paul. All the things that were once important to him, the things that gave him identity and purpose in the world suddenly come to seem supremely unimportant. What were once gains, prizes if you like: his Jewishness, his citizenship, his religion are no longer important (indeed they are as worthless as the rubbish tossed into the street).

In the past months, perhaps individually and as a church, we may have found ourselves making a similar re-assessment. I wonder if you have audited your use of time, your relationships, the value of certain people or certain kinds of work? How have you judged your own attitudes and decisions in the light of that reassessment I wonder?

The gospel paints a dramatic picture of God as judge, taking the vineyard away from the wicked tenants. This is perhaps an unfashionable image, but it seems to me a timely one, as we have been confronted in recent months with our frailty and failing in response to the evils of racism, of our indifference to the lives of the poor and elderly, of our unwillingness to address the climate crisis. The power of the Corona virus itself has been a wake up call highlighting our false sense of security and control as human beings.

God judges the tenants because they have not been good stewards of the vineyard.

Not because they did not value the vineyard, rather because they valued it for the wrong things. They valued those things so much that they were willing to seize them by force. They valued the vineyard for what they could get out of it, for the grapes and the wine – they did not value of the gift, the opportunity, the relationship with the vineyard owner.

In the same way, we might understand Jesus pointing to the poor stewardship of the Priests and Pharisees, who valued the temple, the Torah and the tradition for its own sake and not as signs of their special relationship with, and responsibility to, God.

That relationship is where it all begins. It begins in the realisation that the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.

For Christians it begins in the vision of our true home with God and our truest identity as sisters and brothers of Jesus.

The God of this parable, far from being a distant tyrant waiting to snatch back the vineyard, is the God who is willing to make himself so vulnerable that he risks (and suffers) violence at our hands while calling us to love, humility and justice.

There is so much in the life of this cathedral, in its tradition, its worship, in the beauty of its architecture to be loved and valued. As its congregation and people we join a stream of faithful folk whose prayer and service to the city have endured through hundreds of years. God is faithful and has remained faithful through times of disruption and instability, through plagues and wars, through periods of affluence and economic distress.

I come to serve you mindful that you have endured such a time and that part of the distress created by the virus has been the experience of being excluded from the cathedral building, parted from friends in the congregation and unable to enjoy the gift of music from our wonderful colleagues and choir.

I come wanting to lament with you and to learn with you,  
as we discern together where God has been at work  
in the past eight months  
and what God's preferred future is for us as a congregation  
and as a cathedral.

I come with humility, mindful of those priests and Pharisees  
who were confident in their own leadership  
and unable to hear the prophetic voices  
through which God was trying to speak.

I come in thankfulness for the faithfulness and generosity of God who  
calls each one of us and has called me to this exciting challenge, this  
glorious heritage and this great opportunity.

Jesus tells us in this parable that those who reject the giver of the gift  
will have the gift taken away from them so that it can be restored to  
those who have produced the fruits of the Kingdom.

I pray that we will have the grace to be open to the generosity of God  
and that our gratitude for all that we have been given will overflow into  
a fruitful future.

As I've said at other points this weekend, that future remains hidden and  
uncertain, but together we share in the task of discerning the signs of  
the Kingdom and supporting one another and this city in building on the  
past to share in the nurturing of all that contributes to a fruitful future.