Text: Luke 20:9-20

**Introduction**

It was a buzz word now many years ago when I was in seminary – Relevant. But it is the kind of buzz world that never really leaves. Even for someone like me who thinks that God is always automatically a relevant subject. Proclaiming the Word of God still has to be relevant to our lives. Otherwise we risk the truly precious becoming a dead letter.

And sometimes where I think about the parables that is what I worry they have become. Cute little stories. Kinda memorable. But they don’t really affect our lives. Their meanings have been made either esoteric. Meaning you have to consult with someone like me to get to the true meaning of them. That the deep meaning just isn’t available to anyone willing to meditate on them for a bit. Or they have become purely exoteric. Meaning that they are so obvious they are not worthy of 10 minutes of meditation. And that being that obvious they no longer have the power to move us.

For example the purely exoteric dead letter reading of the wicked tenants would be about Jews and Gentiles. The Jews reject the son so the Vineyard is given to others – gentiles. That would have been meaningful to Jesus’ hearers. And it clearly was, “for they perceived that he had told this parable against them.” It would have been meaningful for a few centuries after. How did this incredible gift come to us who were far away? But eventually it would just become a justification for antisemitism. “These are the ones who killed Christ, let us crush them.”

The esoteric example is much harder. I’m not much of a gnostic and always start to snicker when I hear someone try to impart the “secret knowledge.” But it would something like the universe wants to give you stuff. But the unenlightened person will refuse it. And in their rejection of enlightenment, they will eventually be crushed and enlightenment offered to others. While those crushed are sent back to do it all again.

**Text**

I think that Jesus’ parables instead are usually about the Father. And as such are living for all who are willing to take them up. In this case I think there are three things that the parable wants to emphasize about the Father.

The first thing that the parable wants us to know is about the patience of God. A Man – please read the Father – planted a vineyard – the world – and let it out to tenants – humanity. But I should probably be less universal there and say that the vineyard in the Kingdom and the tenants the covenant people. The lease agreement would be the covenant. And part of that covenant was that “they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.” I’m not sure if it is necessary to be precise about the fruit. Be it praise or glory or good works or any of the typical things. All these things are due to the Father as the fruits of the Vineyard he has leased out.

But sinful man in rebellion against the Father will not live according to the covenant. We will not hand over the fruit. And if this were someone who was renting something from us, we would not take it. We would have the sheriff in kicking those freeloaders out right quick. But what Jesus wants us to know is the patience of the Father. He sends one servant. Then another. And a third. And what do those squatters do? They beat and abuse and treat shamefully all the servants. Now if we treated a deputy that way, we’d have an entire SWAT team on our door real quick. But that is not the way of the Father. The Father does not wish to treat us by means of the law.

Under the law, the Father is perfectly justified. Under the law the Father has shown great patience. Sending Multiple servants to get the tenants to honor the covenant. The patience of God with sinners in long. Waiting for the full number to come in. The Father does not wish the death of the sinner. He grants plenty of time.

**Christology**

The second thing that the parable wishes us to know about the Father is his love. Not wishing to sent the angelic SWAT team to collect, the Father ponders “What Shall I do?” And from a human perspective what he comes up with is insane. These sinners have already abused his servants multiple times. But the Father says, “I will send by beloved son, perhaps they will respect him.”

And Jesus draws out of his audience again the difference between the Father and us. They see the son sent to them and somehow it makes sense in a sin addled mind that if they kill him, the vineyard is theirs.

We can certainly act like this sometimes. Pretty much anytime we might say “I did it my way.” Any time we imagine there is no heaven. Anytime that we forget we are but dust and to dust we shall return. Anytime we think we think we own anything that has been given to us instead of being stewards of God’s creation. My body, my choice.

And when Jesus asks his original hearers what is the end of all such thinking, they give the human answer. “The Owner will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” But that is not what the Father or the Son who was sent does. Instead, God loves the sinner and offers redemption. The death of the son does not seal our fate, but becomes the means of our salvation. “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

**Eschatology**

Because this is the third thing the parable wishes us to hear – the promise of the Father. God is going to build the vineyard. And that vineyard is going to be fruitful. The owner will get his due. And that Kingdom is built on Christ. This is the promise of God.

Everything built on the solid rock that is Christ shall last. That’s the positive form of the promise. You don’t place a cornerstone and then not build. What Jesus paints are the end of a couple of strategies. Maybe we think we can just ignore Christ. That the cross does not convict us. But we all fall on that stone. So studiously avoiding the patience of God and the love of God to follow our own way. Yet we keep tripping over it. Or maybe we think we can place our own cornerstone. Get under the one that God has placed. If we insist on having some other cornerstone, anyone who tries to get under that stone will be crushed. The day will reveal what we built our lives upon.

This is the promise of the Father. He has placed a sure cornerstone. You can build of life, and eternal life, on Christ.

**Moral**

And so the owner has ultimately given the vineyard to others. He’s given the vineyard to you. And he has not given it to us under the old lease agreement, but under the new. The vineyard will be built and it will be fruitful. This is the promise of the Father. The love of the Father is that the vineyard is given to sinners. Sinners who have heard the call of the Son. And the patience of God, that today is the day of grace. Whether it is the first in the morning or the 11th hour, now is the time you can enter the vineyard.

But the cornerstone is Christ. The vineyard grows a particular fruit. Everything in this vineyard is connected to that vine. It lives by the patience, and promise and love of God.

And right now it can feel like the vineyard has been over run. There are people trying to grow their own wild grapes. There are people trying to grow apples or other strange fruits. There are all kinds of ways that people are trying to take the vineyard by force. But the vineyard is yours. The vineyard has been given to all who will live by the patience and promise and love of the Father. And the day will expose the harvest.

The owner is a strange one. He doesn’t do what we’d do. But it’s his vineyard. The only question really is do we want to be in this vineyard. Will we be found to have removed ourselves and it has been given to others.