

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Saturday, October 1, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.  
day, October 2, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

# “You Are Extraordinary”

Matthew 21:33-46

Today we celebrate LWML Sunday and recognize the work of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League. Having attended the LWML Fall Rally a few weeks ago, I was once again amazed by the great need for mission work overseas (there was a presentation on the mission work in Madagascar). There is so much work to do in the Kingdom. There are about 3 million Lutherans in Madagascar. That church is the fastest growing Lutheran Church in the world. To put it in perspective, there are about 2.5 million Missouri Synod Lutherans in America.

The LWML has been instrumental in providing for those spreading the Gospel, sheltering and clothing those in need. Pastor Jansen, who spoke to us about a mission trip he took in 2006 said that the rural area in which he was, the average salary was \$209 per year. Latest statistics show that nationally, the average resident in Madagascar now earns a little over \$900 per year.

Providing clothing, shelter, teaching them skills, educating,

praying for them, and all the other work these ladies accomplish by the power of the Holy Spirit is truly amazing.

What strikes me most about their work is that such great and mighty tasks have been accomplished within the Kingdom through such seemingly ordinary ladies (as if any child of God can be called ordinary.)

But that brings us to our text today. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells a parable that explains the history of God and His extraordinary people. God is the landowner who planted the vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a winepress, and built a watchtower. After all of the real work had been done, then He rented the vineyard to some people to use and produce fruit. Because the landowner was away on a journey, He sent servants to collect the portion of the harvest due to Him.

When we look at Holy Scripture to see how God deals with His people, God always works in the way that Jesus describes in this parable. God always redeems His people first, before asking us to do anything. God is the one who rescued the Israelites from the land of Egypt, provided for their every need, and promised to bring them into the Holy Land. It was only after all of this that God gave them any instructions concerning what He expected of them.

As we learn from the prophet Isaiah in our Old Testament lesson, “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel” [Is.

5:7]. God gave the children of Israel everything that they needed. God did all the work. He planted the vineyard and dug the winepress so that they would prosper. He gave them “a land flowing with milk and honey.” He built the wall and the watchtower so that they would be protected from every enemy. And all that He asked of them in return was for them to produce good fruit.

A couple weeks ago, in our Sunday morning Bible class, studying the book of Acts, the comment was made, after describing what was going on in the ancient society, that the discussion could have just as easily been talking about our society.

As we are the new Israel, it is very easy to see us working within that vineyard. As I said a few weeks ago, when you hear Jesus tell a parable, find yourself in the parable, because you are there.

You are a worker in the vineyard. What is the good fruit that God desires for you to produce and freely give? It is more than just going through the motions on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Unlike the tenants in the parable, we must never forget that everything belongs to Him. We are only stewards of what God has given us.

When God sent His servants, His prophets, to the people of Israel, they killed some of them. They beat and persecuted others. They did not want to listen to what God was saying to

them. They believed only what they wanted to believe and what was convenient for them. But when God sent a servant to show them their faults and show them how displeasing their sins were in the eyes of their Lord, they would not listen, and they were angry with God for doing that.

As I said, it is very easy to see us working within that vineyard. We like to believe only what we want to believe or what is convenient for us at the time, but certainly not the things that point to our faults.

Take the 8th Commandment for example. How closely do you want God to look at your words when you know that God wants you to always defend your neighbor, to always speak well of everyone, and to say everything in the kindest way, or as the old translation of the Catechism said, “put the best construction on everything.”

I said before that those original workers in the vineyard were extraordinary just like you are extraordinary. Why were they extraordinary? God had rescued them from slavery, provided them with everything they needed, had given them His Name, and had called them His own. They didn’t do anything extraordinary. It was God’s relationship with them that made them extraordinary, righteous, and saved. As I said last week, “the change inside of you has come from outside of you.” It was only their rejection of

that relationship that brought destruction.

We are the new Israel. We are the true sons of Abraham, as the Sunday School children love to sing. As the new tenants of the vineyard, we are called to do that which the old tenants did not do: to listen to God's prophets and to listen to God's Son. We recognize that it is God who has done all of the real work in preparing us for His kingdom. He has provided all that we need.

Even for those Lutherans in Madagascar make \$209 per year, He has provided all that they need. The churches are full and growing. And when the Lutherans in Madagascar come to the Lord's Supper, they don't just kneel when they get to the rail. In humble thankfulness for all they have been given, they come on their knees all the way down the aisle.

And they go out and tell others of how their loving Father has forgiven their sins and has protected them from Satan and all evil. Share that same message with those who do not know the love and mercy of Christ.

The work of the LWML and the work of all of God's children – inviting others into the vineyard – is an extraordinary work being accomplished by extraordinary people just like you. Amen.