

“We Are Broken But Not Crushed”

Luke 20:9-19

Let me set the scene for you. It's Tuesday and Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem. He has already had His triumphant entry on Palm Sunday. He has already cleared the money-changers from the Temple. The people are excited about Him. The religious leaders are frightened that their hold upon the people may soon come to an end. And Jesus stands in the Temple courtyard which He cleared the day before, and He tells them a parable which they all understand.

The “vineyard” has always been the symbol for the nation of Israel. This parable is eerily familiar to Isaiah's “Song of the Vineyard” from Isaiah chapter 5 where the vineyard is trampled down and destroyed because it yielded only bad fruit. The owner of the vineyard “looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress” [Is. 5:7].

The owner of the vineyard is, of course, God. He planted it. It was not something that anyone worked for or achieved by their own doing. He rented it to some farmers: the children of Israel; and He went away for a long time.

God met with the children of Israel face to face on Mt. Sinai and told them that the land of the Canaanites was theirs to have at no cost to them

other than that they were to guard and keep His Word, remain faithful to the One, True God, act with mercy and justice toward one another, and once they enter the land flowing with milk and honey, the vineyard that God planted, they were to give of their first-fruits in thanks to the Lord.

This was the agreement between God and the tenants of the vineyard. But the Israelites, having reaped the benefits of living in that land flowing with milk and honey, chose to ignore their side of the bargain. They chased after other gods. They turned a deaf ear to God's Word and commands. They cheated one another out of money. Their mouths were filled with gossip and lies. And they entered into all sorts of shameful activities.

When the Lord sent His servants, His prophets, to the people of the vineyard, they refused to offer thanks to the Lord for all that they had been given; they mocked, beat, and even killed the prophets of God. Which caused Jesus as He was leaving the Temple later that day to lament and speak the words we heard a couple weeks ago in our Gospel lesson: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate" [Mt. 23:37-38].

We are now the tenants of the Vineyard. God has established a new and better covenant. The curtain has been torn in two, Christ has established Himself as the new Temple, and the new Israel, those who share the faith of Abraham, are members of the body of Christ. As it says in our reading from

Philippians, “Christ Jesus has made me His own.” My life within God’s House is not anything that I have worked for or deserve. What we have within our church is a gift from God. Life within the Vineyard is good, and we return thanks to God for all that He has done.

The children of Israel did not understand how good life was in the Vineyard. And as you may well imagine, the chief priests and teachers of the law did not appreciate Christ’s prophecy of their imminent demise. And then Christ further infuriates the Jewish leaders with the question concerning the passage from Psalm 118, where He refers to Himself as the cornerstone which the builder’s had rejected. Jesus gives no direct answer to His question: “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?” Jesus gives no direct answer “because the events of his life in the next few days will provide the answer.”¹

But Jesus does let the people know that there are only two options for a person in regard to that Cornerstone. Everyone will be broken or crushed. Those who believe in Him, His disciples (you and me), must fall into the brokenness of repentance in order to be raised again in the new life we have in Christ.² Jesus said: “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.” St. Paul says, “We are like jars of clay.” Luther explains it in the catechism as the “daily dying and rising of the new man.”

¹Just, *Luke*, 764.

²*Ibid.* 765.

David wrote in the Psalms: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” [Ps. 51:17]. God’s Law breaks us into pieces and in His mercy raises us up as living stones in Christ to be a part of that new Temple of God.³

I know that we all wish that life within the Vineyard, life within Christ’s Church was all flowers and sunshine, but our calling is one of daily contrition and repentance. We are broken, but we are not crushed.

However, for the unbeliever and the unrepentant, with Christ comes the crushing blow of judgment. How good it is to be broken, since there is only one other option as we come in contact with the Living God.

Our salvation is filled with great irony. Jesus Christ is the Author of Life, but we receive life through His death – but don’t forget the resurrection. Through our suffering and pain, we are given strength to persevere. James the brother of our Lord speaks of our pain and trials and says, “Consider it pure joy . . . the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”

Through the demise of the Old Israel, the New Israel is born and the children of Abraham prosper more than ever. Through our “jars of clay” being broken upon the rock of Christ, the Potter molds a new and better creation. Out of once sinful shards of worthless pottery, God has built His church – and Christ is the Cornerstone. Amen.

³Ibid.