

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Lent 5
Saturday, April 5, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 6, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

“We Are Broken but Not Crushed”

Luke 20:9-20

Let me set the scene for you. It’s Tuesday and Jesus is at 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 similar 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 tenants: 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 worshiped Him how they wanted to rather than how God wanted them to. The book of Judges repeatedly condemns them saying, "In those days everyone did as he saw fit." Beyond that, they became lovers of money. The prophets warn them that their mouths were filled with gossip and lies. And they entered into all sorts of shameful activities. It is a lot like our world today.

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 reading: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken" [Lk. 13:31-35].

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 we are the new Israel, along with all those who share the faith of Abraham. We 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, within the kingdom of God 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 so that we may 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."

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

¹Just, *Luke*, 764.

²Ibid. 765.

³Ibid.

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 those outside of Christ, for the unrepentant, for the one who wants to deal with God in the way they did in the time of the Judges where, "everyone did as he saw fit," Christ comes with the crushing blow of judgment. How good it is simply 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. Then, we become more closely connected to the cross of Jesus through our own suffering and pain. It is only when we are broken that we learn to recognize the futility of our own power of reason and strength in matters of faith, which forces us to look solely to the cross of Christ.⁴ Through suffering, 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 painful 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 broken pottery, God has built His church – and Christ is the Cornerstone. Amen.

⁴McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 157.