

October 8, 2017

How Are We to be the New Tenants

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts. And be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

Whenever I read this particular parable and what follows it in the Gospel according to Matthew, it always makes me chuckle just a little bit. Surely, the Chief Priest and the Pharisees recognize in the parable the parallels with the history of Israel. How they were chosen to inhabit the promised land. And that they have strayed over and over again from fulfilling the role that God had given them as a light to the nation. As a chosen people called to bring people to a knowledge and understanding and a relationship with the one true God.

And in failing to do that and instead being drawn more towards what the rest of the world saw as what was important. To see a power and resources, authority. And they were drawn more to that than drawing the world to this relationship with God where they trusted God. Where they were given blessing after blessing.

And God would send the prophets. Speak the word of God, call them back, try to get them to see and understand how they had gone astray from what God had wanted them to do. What

God had called them to be. Until now Jesus has shown up on the scene.

It certainly seems very clear to us. And Matthew in his little, it's more of a commentary statement said that the Chief Priest and the Pharisees perceived that he was speaking about them. Well yeah, how could you miss that?

They were continuing to lead the people in this idea of being okay with the world. That it was alright to follow after the power and the authority and the resources that the rest of the world was clamoring for. And the Chief Priest and the Pharisees were not calling them back. Were not helping them to see and understand that they were called to live a life that different. That they were called to live a life that reflected what God was to them. Gracious, giving, blessing, forgiving.

And now Jesus has come on the scene. The son, the one who has come and he predicts his own death. And then he allows the Pharisees and the High Priest to state what should happen. What will happen when the owner of the vineyard comes back after his son has been killed? Well he'll throw those tenants out, destroy them, and bring new ones in. You would have thought that would make them stop and think and say well, maybe we better listen to this guy. Maybe there is something going on here that we need to listen to, to be a part of. And they're still not able to do that. And that's not unusual when the prophets came very few listened until the punishment came.

We hear this parable and others and we feel pretty good about ourselves. Well we're not the tenants that went the wrong way, we're the new tenants. We're the ones that have been brought in to replace the old ones that went astray. That wouldn't give to the landowner, would not give to God what God wanted. Bearing fruits of love and forgiveness. Of mercy and justice. Every place where the Jews went wrong and therefore were kicked out. We have now come in and taken their place, aren't we wonderful? Without bothering to ask ourselves the question, "Are we doing any better than the first tenants?"

The invitation to the Kingdom of God and nobody understood this better than Paul by the way. And we hear it in his letter to the Philippians. What we are called to do is live according not to that external law and trying to abide by it but to live by faith in a risen Lord and Savior. That actually makes a difference not because of an outside influence but because of the promise to dwell with us. The Holy Spirit in us. To lead a life that reflects what God was looking for from the very beginning. To bear the fruits, fruits of love and compassion. Of forgiveness, all the things that God has been looking for from humanity since the fall.

And hasn't been able to find nearly enough of. Paul understood this because he was a Pharisee, he lived most of his life with the idea and understanding that if I only fulfill the law well enough that I have a righteousness even before God. That our relationship is good and is okay because it is based on the law. I

have studied the law. I have followed the law to the best of my ability. And he says and I'm righteous. I was righteous as far as the law was concerned. Until I met the risen Lord. And then things changed.

All of a sudden, I was face to face with God. And God said no matter how hard you work you're not ever going to have a righteousness based on the law. But all is not lost. Now you have a righteousness that comes to you from God. And it's based on what was accomplished for you. Not by a teacher, not by a prophet, but by the son of God. And you can put the law aside. Not worry about the law. But live your life with the faith that the son of God has come into the world to forgive the sins of all. And you are part of that. And you can now live by faith. It doesn't mean that you don't fulfill the law, you will fulfill the law even better than you ever did before. Because it's not just an external thing. It is who you have become with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And you will find it not something that you have to keep reminding yourself of and saying did I do the right thing at the right time. You will see people differently. You will care for people on an entirely different level. Not because you are afraid of punishment because you see in them the presence of Christ. The presence of God in them as much as in you. And you will want to care. You will want to give out of abundance. You will be able to see the presence of Christ in the eyes of brothers and sisters. You have gone from being a chosen people based

on law to members of the Kingdom of God based on faith. And on what has been accomplished on your behalf because of the son of God.

You're no longer just members of an elect group. You are adopted children of God. And as children of God, God has asked you to participate in the family business. To love, to care, to reach out. To ensure justice and mercy. To share the forgiveness that you yourselves celebrate. That God forgives you your sins. You are called to offer, extend that same forgiveness to others. That's the fruits that God is looking for from the tenants, from the children, from us.

It's always nice from our perspective to read the parables and think well Jesus was talking about those people and they weren't doing a very good job. It's important for us to put ourselves in that same place. Are we living a life that reflects the love and the blessings of God to a world that is trying to draw us away from that? Trying to draw us to see that power and resources and abundance to the detriment of others is an okay thing. Are we being drawn away from God's kingdom? Or are we drawing others to God's kingdom? The fruits of Jesus that God is looking for are to bring others to know a new way. To see each other in a new way. To live our lives not by law but by faith and grace.

Father Gregory Hein