

October 4
WORLD COMMUNION
"One God, and One World"
Matthew 21:33-46
Rev. Pat Weatherwax

Matthew 21:33-46 NRSV

Jesus said:

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and **went to another country.**

When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, **'They will respect my son.'**

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, **the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.** The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Holy Word, holy wisdom, Thanks be to God

INTRODUCTION

We're taking a week away from Pastor Jeff's final sermon series on "Basic Christianity" to focus on our common humanity, as we celebrate World Communion

Sunday. We believe in one God. We live in one world. We celebrate the gift of Jesus Christ, our only hope,.Whatever the circumstances, we live this life, together.

It seems to me that we especially remember the times in our lives when lightbulbs go off in our heads; when we realize a truth, and it become part of how we see the world around us. One time, for me, was in my seventh grade language arts class, with Mrs. Hoos. It's when I really came to understand metaphors *and* formulated my theology that our world is designed to be one community, not many separate and feuding nations, but one world, with one common humanity.

We were studying the poem: *Mending Wall* By Robert Frost. Here's some of it:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun; ...

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense. ...
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44266/mending-wall>

Robert Frost.

We had to write an essay "Do good fences make good neighbors?" and I, with naivete or maybe wishful thinking, that I still hold onto, wrote "NO! We should be one world, the people of one God. We need to take down the walls that divide us". That's not exactly culturally sensitive, but it is truly heartfelt. We may need boundaries, but why do we need so many barriers?

Jesus and Robert Frost ask: "What are we walling in or walling out?"

THE PARABLE SAYS:

In Verse 33: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, ... leased it to tenants and **went to another country.**

The parable has a source that you may not know, but the Jewish leaders whom Jesus was trying to school on God's ways, certainly did know. Check out Isaiah 5! It's the prophet Isaiah's version of the parable, that starts just like this vineyard. The leaders challenging Jesus knew their scriptures and how that writing went: It says: "God looked for justice but saw bloodshed, for righteous, but heard cries of distress. Woe to you!" (Isaiah 5:7-8) .

The NRSV sub-heading of this in Isaiah is a "Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard". So, Jesus was quite "in the face" of the chief priests and elders who were questioning his authority to teach them, while they were rejecting so many of God's beloved people.

IF/THEN

If: the master goes to other countries to plant other vineyards and gardens; then: God's people are found everywhere, and definitely outside our borders and boundaries. All people are God's people. **Our one God created one world.** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1).

Recently on Facebook, in a batch of *Kids' Questions to God*, was this one, which caught my heart:

"Dear God,
Who draws the lines around the countries?
Love, Nan"

One God (known in three persons) created one world, in the beginning. And it was good.

After the flood, the narratives say God's desire was for people to spread out and fill the world. The Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11, explains that God caused language disunity to get Noah's people, God's people, to spread out, as they were directed. The disunity didn't *need* to manifest itself as "us and them", but does tend to be our default human behavior.

Something there is (in God) that doesn't love a wall.

THE PARABLE ALSO SAYS:

Verse 37 "He sent his son to them, saying, '**They will respect my son.**'"

IF/THEN

If the Master sends his son, then the master wants us to follow the leadership of that son. In writing for our upcoming Advent devotional I'm responding to John's gospel, the well known verses from chapter 3:16-17 (TPT):

For this is how God *loved* the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Jesus knew why he was on the earth. God knew *love* was the answer. (And by the way, if you'd like to write for the advent devotional, let me know! It's coming together nicely, but we need more writers!)

In the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament, God's people had seemingly contradictory instructions, depending on the situation: conquer and love, isolate and

mingle, kill and forgive. Their prophets perpetually were abused, ignored and disavowed. That's another human trait, to shoot the messenger; to resort to anger when we're being challenged to "straighten up and fly right".

Jesus, though, did not focus on conquering, or isolating or death. Instead... peace and love, community and inclusion, grace and forgiveness: these are the lessons we learn from the Master's Son. That's what we read in the gospels about Jesus life, and in the rest of the New Covenant- redemption because of God's gift. A better way to be.

Henri Nouwen, best know for his writing about *and* living a spirituality of community and compassion, noted this:

For Jesus, there are no countries to be conquered, no ideologies to be imposed, no people to be dominated, there are only children, women and men to be loved.

Our one God created one world.

Our one God is creating one world through the Son.

In this new creation God is asking us to be united in love. Something there is (in God) that doesn't love a wall.

THE PARABLE SAYS:

In verse 43: "Therefore I tell you, **the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.**"

IF/THEN

If we want to be a part of God's world, on earth *as it is in heaven*, then we're directed to live with that big picture in our mind and heart. Not like the Pharisees, creating more rules, but to produce fruit- something beneficial. We are "blessed to be a blessing", "Called as Partners in God's service", aware that God's got "The Whole World in His Hands". We need to be productive in our vineyards, the gardens we call home..

Today we celebrate that there are Christians all over the world sharing the holy feast at the table of God. Jesus repeats the directive that God gave: love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus also set the table of inclusion for all people with this point: God's kingdom is alive in those who are willing to share the good news with a troubled world. Jesus asks us to love and care about the whole world, not just people "like us". Everyone is welcomed at the table in God's world. We have to make that known and make a difference in our world.

How do we make a difference? Again quoting Henri Nouwen:

We are not called to save the world, solve all problems, and help all people. But we each have our own unique call, in our families, in our work, in our world. We have to keep asking God to help us see clearly what our call is and to give us the strength to live out that call with trust. Then we

will discover that our faithfulness to a small task is the most healing response to the illnesses of our time.

We know what the illnesses of our time are: the virus, social-political divisions, privilege and racism, and violence against others taking many forms. We are called to do our part to heal our disease, our dis-ease.

If there is work you are sensing that God's asking you to do, and you aren't doing it, *you* are losing out. God's desires will be done- by someone who is willing to labor in that vineyard. God is asking us to be united, as people of God, even as we prefer to choose sides. A precautionary note, by Jill Dunfield, Author of the Presbyterian Outlook Journal:

The tenants of whom Jesus speaks in this parable are neither Jew nor Greek — they are human beings, none of them righteous, all sinners, each in need of this cautionary tale. We are all tenants, not the landowner. We are all entrusted with stewarding the harvest and respecting the vineyard, its produce, its owner, the other tenants and those whom the owner sends to execute the owner's will....

Knowing Christ, how can we not press forward to what lies ahead? Why would we want anything other than to participate in God's good, abundant future? Why would we want to be anything other than a tenant in such a glorious, life-filled, beautiful vineyard?

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/o/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/FMfcgxwJZJQfTDsDQHhVM SRpFhJKvgSF>

Our one God created one world.

Our one God is creating one world through the Son,

Our one God will create one world, for eternity, on earth as it is in heaven.

Something there is (in God) that doesn't love a wall.