

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD,

Please be seated,

Today's Gospel tells the story of the Vineyard.

But first, some context. Jesus is at the Temple, being interrogated by the Chief Priests and Pharisees who are trying to trap him into open rebellion against the Church. Jesus has answered their questions with parables that, while not openly challenging the Jewish religion, questions its relevance and meaning to the people of Israel.

The Landowner, God, plants a vineyard, puts a sturdy fence around it, digs a wine press in it and builds a watchtower. It sounds to me like He made a pretty well fortified and self sufficient vineyard, set aside, protected from the world.

Then He leased it to tenants and went away to another country. He had put in place all that was necessary for the growing, nurturing, harvesting and selling of the crop. He could go elsewhere, the vineyard was covered! Go elsewhere, to do what? To Build another Vineyard? Sit back and reap the fruits of His investment? Avoid taxes? We don't know.

We do know that after the harvest he sent his representatives, his slaves, to get due payment from the tenants.

But instead of paying what they owed, the tenants seized the slaves, beat one, killed another and stoned another. Very friendly. I guess, "while the cat's away...."

So the Master, God, sends another group of slaves, a bigger group this time to collect His due. They received the same fate.

Then, thinking that even the worst tenants would respect his Son, Jesus, he sent that Son to collect His due. The tenants said, "This is the heir, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Now if I was a better biblical scholar, I could probably figure out who the first two groups were who came to collect that which is due to the Master, but I don't.

I am pretty sure, however, that the vineyard is a symbol of the Temple, of the essence of Jewish faith at that time, and that the tenants were the chief priests and Pharisees.

Dictionary.com defines Pharisee *as* a member of a Jewish sect that flourished during the 1st century b.c. and 1st century a.d. and that it believed in the strict observance of religious ceremonies and practices, adherence to oral laws and traditions, and belief in an afterlife and the coming of a Messiah.

Reza Aslan, a Muslim, who wrote the book [Zealot: Jesus of Nazareth](#), described the Temple of Jesus' time as a money making machine, steeped in a highly complex set of rules and requirements that the country Jews that supported it couldn't live up to and couldn't obey, with financial requirements that drained their lifeblood. It is a fascinating book and I highly recommend it to anyone who would like to place Jesus in the historical context of His time.

Anyhow, back to the Parable, Jesus asks his Chief Priests and Pharisees what the Master, His Father, should do to those tenants. They reply "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 replies to them with a piece of scripture, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?”

He, Jesus, has become the cornerstone, the Savior of the world.

Then speaking to the Chief Priests and Pharasies, he tells them, “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the Kingdom.”

Jesus was a Jew. His parable was an open challenge to them, to their practice of Judaism, to their authority, to the very roots of His upbringing and education. They were not happy with him, to say the least.

So who are we? Are we people who produce the fruits of the Kingdom?

We are a congregation in the midst of a search, a search ostensibly for a new Priest, but a search that is in reality a search for our identity – a search for the fruits that we want to produce in God’s Kingdom.

We are a congregation with a storied past, when the average Sunday attendance was in the hundreds, when there were with three services, when there were many missions.

We are a small congregation, caught in the uncertainty of being between the past and the future: A welcoming congregation; a diverse congregation; a loving congregation. We are blessed with each other, our beautiful Church, our devoted Clergy. Truly Blessed.

Early in the Summer we completed the Conversation Survey, which developed a statistical profile of our congregation, we have recently

conducted three small group activities aimed at putting the emotion onto the statistics.

I had the pleasure of facilitating two of those sessions.

I heard of people's pride at what we accomplish – the few, the proud, the Trinitarians! I heard people's love of our blending of the traditional and the progressive. I heard of our sadness when so many families had to move out of the area during the recent (and in my opinion, ongoing) recession.

But most of all, I heard a love of God, a love of Trinity and a passion for Trinity's survival and prosperity.

Your Search Committee, Marilou, Pat, Ken, Chireen, Gale, Tom, and I, will be taking the information we gleaned from those sessions, synthesizing with the statistical information from the Conversations Survey and preparing our Parish Profile.

That profile will be our advertising campaign; it will champion Trinity's fruits of God's Kingdom that we will use to attract a new Priest, a Priest who will share those fruits and help Trinity's Garden grow.

I cannot conclude without thanking Fred and Hildur Bogvilo, whose generous bequest has enabled us to undertake our search, fix up our wonderful Church and afford a half time Priest while we grow into our harvest. Bless them, remember them, and model yourself after them.

I'd like to close with a prayer that can be found on page 817 in the Book of Common Prayer – Number 11, *For the Parish*

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*