

“Desperate Love”
Luke 20:9-20
April 3, 2022

Desperate people will often do desperate things. I’ve watched the people of Ukraine on the news leaving their homes and traveling to other countries for safety. I have a hard time imaging what it would be like to leave your home and your livelihood behind and settling in another country temporarily, not knowing if your home or your community will still be there when you return. Imagine not knowing when or if you will return, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

In our Gospel lesson for today we see Jesus in a desperate situation. It was Tuesday of Holy Week, three days before He would die, and the religious leaders of the day still did not believe that Jesus was the promised Savior sent from God. Even though He had been telling them and showing them through a variety of signs and miracles for three years that He was the Christ, they still did not believe Him. In the words leading up to our Gospel lesson we see Jesus teaching in the temple when the religious leaders interrupted Him and asked, “Who gave you this authority?” This question indicated that they were still rejecting Jesus as the promised Messiah. So, knowing that He was going to die in 3 days, Jesus makes one last desperate attempt to save these guys. He goes all out as He tells His supporters and His enemies a very clear and direct parable, indicating that He knows exactly what’s going to happen over the next several days.

The story begins with a man who planted a vineyard and then rented it to some tenants. The man who owned the vineyard then went away for a long time, but when it was time for the harvest he sent a servant to collect some of the fruit from the vineyard. Now this is perfectly logical. The owner expects to be paid rent by the tenants. After all, the tenants don’t own the land, and so they owe rent in the form of crops or fruit to the owner. But it says that the tenants beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. Now we have a problem. These unruly

tenants don't own the land they work, but they are acting like the vineyard belongs to them and it is unfair for the owner to ask them for rent.

Can you imagine if we were 3 months behind on our mortgage here at the church and if the bank sent someone here to collect the mortgage, instead of paying it we responded by saying, "We're not paying, now get out of here," and then slammed the door in their face? I can't imagine the bank then sending a second person to collect the mortgage, after being treated in such a way. I would guess that the bank would probably start some kind of legal proceedings against our church in order to get their money.

And yet, here in this parable, the owner of the vineyard sends another servant to collect the rent. But to this servant, the tenants not only beat him and sent him away empty handed, but it says that they also treated him shamefully – indicating that there is a progression in the violence of these tenants. A third servant was then sent to collect the rent and it says that they wounded this servant and sent him away empty-handed. The word, "wounded," in this text comes from a word that means, "to traumatize," indicating that this third servant was beaten so badly that he was traumatized by the event. Finally, the owner sends his own son – thinking that they would respect him, but the tenants killed him. With every gesture of patience and kindness on the part of the owner, the tenants become more and more violent.

The behavior of the tenants in this story is certainly shocking, but what is even more shocking is the reaction of the owner. Why would any parent in his/her right mind, after having sent 3 servants in a row to collect the rent – all of whom get beaten up – send his son to speak to the tenants? This defies logic. What owner would be so patient? What owner would be so loving? None. Any normal owner would have removed those tenants after they beat up the first servant. But God is the owner in this story and the love of God is never logical. The servants represent the

prophets who God had sent for generations in the Old Testament to get the people to turn from their wicked ways and worship Him only. But for generations, God's people turned away from Him. Moved by his deep love and mercy, He sends His Son as a final desperate act of love to try and save these tenants – namely, these religious leaders. That is the shocking thing in this story.

The love of God is so shocking here, because Jesus knows they are going to put Him to death on Friday, and yet, He warns them with this parable to honor God as a way to try and save them. In other words, if I knew someone was plotting to kill me, I certainly would have a hard time trying to save their life, but that's how much Jesus cared. He still wanted them to see their sins and their need for a Savior.

But what did these religious leaders decide to do? They looked for a way to arrest Jesus immediately, because they knew He had spoken this parable against them. They knew the meaning of the parable, and yet they were all the more determined to see the parable come true. This is stunning, but the most shocking part of the whole story is that Jesus knew they would try to kill him, and He let them. Why? So that He could die for their sins. Instead of condemning them on the spot, Jesus put their sins on His shoulders and died for them. That is amazing grace that is very difficult for us to understand.

While Jesus did everything He could to save these religious leaders they still turned against Him, but notice what He does then with the vineyard in this parable. Instead of just doing the work himself and enjoying the fruit of the harvest Himself, it says in verse 16 that the tenants will be destroyed and God will give the vineyard to others; and those "others" are all of us. But let's be honest about the situation. God did not give us this vineyard, His world that He created, that belongs to Him, and ask us to take care of it because we were good people. We are sinners, just like those religious leaders, but instead of giving up on us, God in His mercy gave us His vineyard.

I don't think we will ever be able to understand how and why God operates the way He does; but it certainly has something to do with His profound love for you and me. So how are we going to respond? What are we going to do with this good news of God's love that He has given us? When I look at the opportunities we all have from God to reach out to people, I think one of the best places to start sharing this incredible news of God's love, grace, and forgiveness, outside of our families, is with people who don't attend worship or don't know Jesus right in our own neighborhoods. Just imagine if we loved our neighbors with the same passion as Jesus loves us. I don't think any of us have neighbors like these tenants in this parable, but I'm sure many of us have neighbors who don't always treat us nicely or who don't treat us very well. But imagine if we were to treat them with the same kind of desperate compassionate love that God showed to those tenants, even if they reject us. While I don't think any of us are going to be mistaken for Jesus, just imagine if people saw Jesus in our behavior and heard Him in our words and said, "This person in my neighborhood is so kind and so loving, that it's like having Jesus live in my neighborhood." Wouldn't that be fantastic?

Now I know that's not easy, as there will be people in our neighborhoods who will show no interest in Jesus and they might even be rude to us when we try to share God's love and mercy with them. But we must never give up. I think we need to have a desperate love for them, because no matter how discouraged we might get, if our neighbors continue to reject Jesus the day will come when they discover that they were wrong and they will have lost their inheritance of eternal life with God.

While many may refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, that doesn't change the fact that He is God's Son. And sooner or later we are all going to have to admit that Jesus Christ is Lord. So let us pray that for all unbelievers, that realization comes sooner rather than later. God

is our owner and our Heavenly Father, who created us and loves us, therefore it is our joyful duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him as we desperately seek to be Jesus to others.