

Topic: The Parable of the Landowner and the Vineyard

Title: Stewardship Responsibilites

Some preachers like to begin with a good Bible pun—those groan-worthy little jokes that make us roll our eyes and smile at the same time. When the Old Testament reading is from Genesis, you hear classics like, *“Need a boat? I Noah guy,”* or *“Why did Noah punish the chickens on the ark? They were using fowl language.”* And of course, the perennial favorite: *“How does Moses make his coffee? Hebrews it.”*

What makes puns work is that they force us to make new connections. There’s that tiny moment when the brain catches up, the meaning flips, and we groan or giggle. Suddenly we’re thinking about familiar words in unfamiliar ways.

Jesus’ parables do something similar—except instead of aiming for a chuckle, they aim for transformation. His stories take what people assume about God, themselves, and the world, and turn those assumptions inside out. In today’s Gospel, the Parable of the Vineyard does exactly that. The religious leaders believed they controlled the temple’s life. They acted as if they owned the vineyard—its authority, its prestige, its spiritual power. But Jesus reminds them that they are tenants, not landowners. Everything they oversee belongs to God, and their calling is not for possession or control, but stewardship.

And the parable is not just for them. It is for us. It tells us that one day, each of us will give an account of what we have done with the gifts, responsibilities, and opportunities entrusted to us. Isaiah’s vineyard song, the psalmist’s plea for restoration, Paul’s humble perseverance—all of today’s readings echo the same truth: God has planted us, tended us, and blessed us, and He seeks fruit from our lives.

When God begins to work in us—when His kingdom presses into our assumptions—things must change. Like a pun, the Gospel invites us to see differently. But unlike a pun, the shift is not momentary; it is lifelong. God is reshaping how we understand ownership, responsibility, and grace. He is teaching us what it means to live as faithful tenants in His vineyard.

When Paul writes to the Philippians, he begins by laying out his spiritual résumé—his heritage, his training, his flawless adherence to the law. But then he does something astonishing: he reclassifies all of it. What he once counted as gain, he now calls loss. What he once took pride in, he now considers rubbish. Why? Because something far greater has captured his life. For he ***“came to regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.”***¹ Paul has discovered that true righteousness is not earned, inherited, or achieved. It is received—through faith in Christ alone.

Psalm 80 echoes this same longing. Israel knows it has not borne the fruit God desires. The vineyard walls are broken down, the vines are scorched, and the people cry out for restoration. Yet even in their failure, they plead for God’s face to shine upon them again. They know that renewal comes not from their own strength, but from God’s mercy.

There is a story about a little boy who fell out of bed, and his mother asked how it happened. He replied, “I stayed too near where I got in.” Spiritually speaking, that’s where many people live. They rejoice that their sins are forgiven and their place in heaven secured—but they never move beyond the starting point. They stay “where they got in.”

But that was never Paul’s way. Paul refused to settle for spiritual infancy. His life was marked by a relentless desire to grow in grace. ***“I want to know Christ, he says—“to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him***

¹ Philippians 3:7-8

in his death.² Paul understood that a living relationship with Christ is not static. It is dynamic, stretching us, reshaping us, and sometimes breaking us open so that deeper roots can grow.

In my own ministry, I have learned that suffering often becomes the doorway to deeper knowing. My years in hospice chaplaincy taught me this in ways I will never forget. I stood with families in their most heartbreaking moments—holding hands, hearing stories, watching tears turn to laughter as memories surfaced. Those rooms felt like holy ground. In shared suffering, people revealed their truest selves, and grace became almost tangible.

So it is with Christ. When we share in His sufferings, we enter sacred territory. Hardships have driven me to prayer, humbled my pride, and awakened a hunger for God’s Word. The psalmist says, ***“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.”***³ Affliction is not meant to derail us but to deepen us. As Paul reminds us in Romans, ***“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”***⁴

Seen through the lens of today’s parable, all of this brings us to a point of decision. How will we treat the vineyard entrusted to us? Will we acknowledge that God has called us to bear fruit? Will we work, pray, and give to build up His kingdom? Will we allow His Word to reshape how we think, act, and live?

Paul himself admits he has not arrived. ***“Not that I have already obtained this,”*** he says, ***“but I press on.”***⁵ He lets go of privilege, status, and self-reliance so he can strain toward the life God desires. God’s call requires effort—stretching, reaching, pressing forward.

² Philippians 3:10

³ Psalm 119:67

⁴ Romans 8 :31

⁵ Philippians 3:12-13

God has taken hold of us so that our lives might become fruitful offerings, rooted in compassion and solidarity with a broken world.

We are tenants in God’s vineyard. We have a responsibility to nurture what He has planted, to tend what He has entrusted, and to bear the fruit His kingdom needs. So let us make God’s aim our aim. Let us press on. And one day, by His grace, we will receive *“the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him.”*⁶

So as we stand before these scriptures today—Isaiah’s vineyard song, the psalmist’s plea for restoration, Paul’s relentless pursuit of Christ, and Jesus’ parable of the tenants—we are reminded that God has planted His kingdom in us with purpose. He has entrusted us with gifts, responsibilities, and opportunities meant to bear fruit in the world He loves. We are not owners, but stewards; not possessors, but participants in God’s ongoing work of renewal. And though the path of growth may lead us through suffering, stretching, and surrender, Christ Himself goes before us. He takes hold of us so that we may press on, cultivating lives that reflect His grace, His compassion, and His hope. May we step forward with courage, tending the vineyard entrusted to us, confident that the God who calls us is faithful—and has *“appointed us to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”*⁷

Prayer: And now, may the God who planted us in His vineyard strengthen our hands for faithful stewardship, steady our hearts in every trial, and fill our lives with the fruit of His Spirit. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever.
Amen.

⁶ James 1:12

⁷ John 15:16