

The Vineyard (Ten Years Later)

Matthew 20: 1-16

#13 in Stories Jesus told Series Peter Hiatt

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Prayer

Lord God, we thank you that you make beautiful things out of dust. Lord, I pray that you would make a beautiful thing right now. I thank you that you make beautiful things with your Word. You speak your Word into the dust, and then you take your Word and you wrap it in flesh. And He was born in a manger, and we beheld His glory—glory as of the only Son from the Father. So, we thank you that you make beautiful things, and you make them in such a beautiful way through Jesus Christ our Lord. And now, make a beautiful thing out of us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Message

On the morning of May 29, 1983, I rolled over and gazed into the face of my new bride. The day before we'd entered into a covenant. That night we celebrated the sacraments of that covenant as we communed: body and blood—a sanctuary of our covenant love. I had given her myself, and all my things with me. She opened her eyes, gazed into my face and said, "Now . . . what do I get?" "I love you, I cook and clean, I have sex with you, now what do I get?" It absolutely broke my heart, and I began to bleed and bleed and bleed and bleed. Blood flowed off the bed, out the door, and covered the whole land to the depth of a horse's bridle.

You know, of course that didn't really happen . . . to me. What bride would ever say such a thing to her groom?

Matthew 19: 27-30

Then Peter [responded] and said to [Jesus], "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we [get]?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration (palingenesia—literally "new genesis") when God makes all things new with His Word.)when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands; for My name's sake shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first.

If that's true, what's the point of competing? What's the point of trying to be first by making another last? If that's true, this entire competitive world of self-advancement is a lie. This entire competitive creation – "survival of the fittest" – is an exercise in futility.

Many, (which we've noted, often means all) . . . "Many who are first will be last, and the last first." Then Jesus tells a story.

Ten years and ten months ago, I preached on this story that Jesus told. Up until that day, it seemed as if I had gotten quite a lot for following Jesus: the fastest growing church in our denomination, public accolades, respect, a brand new campus, and a nice salary. After that day, some staff grew rather angry, and some people complained to the authorities, and in three years, I was standing before a crowd of people being tried as a heretic.

This is basically that sermon.

Matthew 19:30 – 20:4

Jesus says: *“Many who are first will be last and the last first.”*

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour (about 9 a.m.) and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.”

“Whatever is right” [*dikaios* – usually translated as “righteous” or “just”]. The vineyard owner promises to be just.

We think justice is people getting what they deserve . . . but it can't be, for then there would be no justice, for people deserve nothing, for they were created from nothing and God.

Justice is not people getting what they deserve.
Justice is God getting what God deserves, and He deserves people—in His image.

Matthew 20: 4-8

[He] said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.” So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour (that's 5 p.m.) he went out and found others standing idle (unfruitful), and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive. So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the laborers and give them their wages.”

Pop quiz: In the vineyard of the Kingdom, how much do we earn in wages?
Technically, nothing. Right? *“For it's not by works, lest any should boast.”*
It's all GRACE. Or maybe, technically, death: *“For the wages of sin is death”* – we earn nothing, certainly not Life; we earn death.

Matthew 20: 8-10

. . . when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their wages (misthos – "wage" or "reward"), beginning with the last to the first." And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.

Now Scripture talks about rewards in Heaven. They must be somehow unique to each person.

But how could God give "more" to one than to another, if, as Paul tells us,

- He gives us "Christ and all things with Him." (Romans 11: 32)
- And, as He says to the Corinthians, "Let no one boast of men, for all things are yours." (1Corinthians 3: 21)

ALL things!

Matthew 20:10 – 15

When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner saying, "These last men have worked only an hour and you made them equal to us who have born the burden of the heat of the day. But he answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish (thelo; I wish, I will, I choose) to give to this last man the same as you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I choose with my own things?"

God's things are all things – including you. So if your will conflicts with God's will, whose will should prevail? What would be just?

We American Evangelical Christians, I think, seem to have a rather unbiblical notion of this thing called "free will." We talk as if our "free will" saves us, but according to Scripture, apart from God's grace, none of us has a good "free will," but instead a will that's enslaved to sin. Sin is a bad will. We're not saved by our will; we're saved from our will. We're saved from our sins by God's will, who gives us a good free will in order that none should boast and we all should give praise to God for his glorious grace.

Matthew 20:15-16

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first and the first last.

The *eschatos protos* and the *protos eschatos*.

Well the Lord gives them each the same regardless of what we would call their “choice” or their “merit.” Think of a person that in your mind least merits Heaven. It could be Judas Iscariot. It could be your enemy, maybe someone that abused you. Imagine that you have arrived at the great banquet and they’re seated next to you. Would you still eat the bread? Would you still drink the wine?

According to the Apostle Paul, the person who merits heaven the least will be there. And you remember his name, right? It’s Saul of Tarsus—that’s Paul. And he wrote in the Bible (1 Timothy 1:15) “I am the protos (the chief, the foremost) of sinners.”

Now you might say, “Well Judas was a worse sinner than Paul,” which is to say Scripture is wrong. But I believe that Scripture cannot be broken. You might point out Scripture calls Judas the “son of perdition,” and that’s correct. “And so it’s impossible for him to be saved” you say, and that is incorrect! For in just the paragraph before, they ask Jesus: “*Who then can be saved?*” after the whole rich young ruler thing. He says, “*With man it’s impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” And besides, who are you to tell the Creator what He can and He cannot do with His things? Jesus just looked at the twelve, which would’ve included Judas, and said, “Assuredly I say to you all that in the regeneration—new genesis (which must be after perdition, and everything’s burned up) y’all sit on twelve thrones judging Israel.”

So what if Judas is there?

What if your very worst enemy is there?

Jesus said, “*If you don’t forgive others, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive you.*” You know, un-forgiveness is the unforgivable sin. You must pay back your un-forgiveness, - with forgiveness. Jesus said, “*Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers,*” and Judas, which means Judah, was definitely, more than any other disciple, more like Jesus’ brothers. “*Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do unto me.*” So, you damn Judas and you damn Jesus, which is to damn yourself.

“*Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers, you do to me,*” said Jesus. And maybe you say, “Well my enemy is not Christ’s brother. How do you know that? Did you judge him? Jesus also said, “*The judgement that you pronounce will be the judgement you receive.*” And Jesus said to all that were listening that day in the Sermon on the Mount, “Pray, Our Father.” “Our Father,” which means we’re all brothers and sisters. Maybe ALL are Christ’s brothers and sisters because through Him “*God reconciles to Himself all things making peace by the blood of His cross*” (Colossians 1: 19). And “*Scripture cannot be broken*”, said Jesus.

“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15).

Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 6: 18).

For to this end we toil and strive,” this is why we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God who is the savior of all men, especially to those who believe.
(1 Timothy 4)

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord.
(Philippians 2: 9-11)

“Every tongue” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12)

And “Whoever calls on the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2)

And:

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Revelations 5: 13)

And He who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also, he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Revelations 21:5)

This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.
(1 Timothy 2: 3-6)

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
(2 Peter 3:9)

Ephesians 1: 11,

He “accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.”

1 Corinthians 13: 7,

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” “Love never fails.” (NKJV, New King James Version)

“God is love.” “In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.” (1 John 4: 7)

Romans 11: 32 – 36,

For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that He may have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?” (like receive a wage) For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

At this point in the sermon, ten years and ten months ago, I said, “Shabat.” “Stop” and “look at your heart.” “Look at your heart,” for there is one of two emotions in your heart, and probably both at once. In some of you there is a thrill; a wild and outrageous hope has just been set ablaze; and in some of you, there is anger – intense anger.

Maybe you’re thinking of a person and thinking, “I can’t believe that piece of crap gets in.” Maybe you’re thinking of a group of people (named or unnamed but to you), they are “*the last*,” which makes you “*the first*” so you think, “I can’t believe those SOB’s get the same wages as I do.”

You’re angry,

Like Jonah was angry outside the walls of Ninevah– when God refused to destroy it.
Like the older brother was angry standing in the field in outer darkness outside the party His Father had thrown for his Prodigal brother.

Like the Pharisees were angry with Jesus when He ate with tax collectors and sinners.

You’re angry like we’re all angry at some point. You’re angry, and you want to call me a heretic, but this is your problem, all I did was quote Scripture (a lot) and Jesus said, “*Scripture cannot be broken.*”

See? Like a God-ordained knucklehead, that’s what I said ten years, and ten months ago this week. Since that time, I think I’ve preached on about every passage people quote to say it’s impossible for God to save everybody.

Ten years ago, I understood it less – that is: Hades, *Gehenna*, the eternal fire, and *pelle, genesia*. Now I understand it more, and I see how it could all be true, but even so, I’ll say now, what I said then:

I’m not called to understand how it all works.

I’m called to believe what God says.

I’m called to believe and certainly to hope what God hopes.

So, if believing “all will be saved” is heresy, it’s my favorite heresy.

And if hoping that “none should perish” is heresy, then God is a heretic! For He clearly wills that none should perish.

And isn’t it lawful that God should do as He wills with His own creation?

Within three years of speaking those words, I was being publicly tried (and some of you were there) on the floor of the Presbytery of the West in the Evangelical Presbyterian

Church. They ruled that I had to recant and confess:

1. There was a group of people “impossible to save.”
2. God was “pleased” to damn a portion of mankind, and by that they meant endless perdition.

They judged me – but maybe they felt judged by me. I tried not to judge them and yet, the word Jesus spoke did judge them and judges us, right now. We thought we were judging this parable – judging the Word and lo and behold the Word of Grace is judging us. It cuts between two things:

That part of you – thrilled with Grace, that part of you that rejoices at the thought: “Maybe God gets His wish, His choice, His desire” “Maybe love doesn’t fail.” “Maybe God will give me a new heart that wills the good because it wants the good, a good free will.” And maybe God will redeem everyone the way He redeems me.”

I’m the chief of sinners – but now I got nothin’ against nobody. I hope all get in.

The Word cuts between that:

- #1 Your love of grace and
- #2 Your anger.

Maybe you don’t want everyone to be saved.

Maybe you don’t want the will of God, which means you don’t want the Kingdom of God, which means you’ll cast yourself out of the vineyard.

See? “If you don’t like Grace . . . you can go to hell. I mean you can go to “*outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth.*” But you can’t stay there without end, for, in the end, that place will be thrown into the lake of fire and burning hot divinity and death will be no more, and every knee will bow and worship the Lord—who is Love.

Sometimes people will ask, “If everybody is eventually saved, where’s the urgency in preaching the Gospel?” Well, if you ask that question, maybe you don’t believe, for if you believed the good news, you’d want to speak the good news. But there is urgency, just not the way you might expect.

In the New Testament, I count eighteen explicit warnings given to people about what the King James translates as “*Hell*” (that’s *Hades* and *Gehenna*). All eighteen are spoken by Jesus, and all eighteen are spoken to His church (His *ekklesia*), the religious people of Israel, who were convinced they were in, and others were out; who believed they were chosen, because others weren’t chosen; who believed they were chosen, because they chose to be chosen—people who believe that their own will is salvation, their judgment is salvation – their choice is salvation.

The name “*Jesus*” means “*God is Salvation.*” Jesus is God’s choice, God’s judgment, God’s will and God’s grace. So, if you don’t like God’s will, consider yourself cursed, for “*the wrath of God remains on you*” as Jesus puts it (John 3). If you don’t like God’s Word of Grace, consider yourself cursed; and I suggest you drop to your knees and beg for mercy and you’ll have mercy – but when you receive mercy, you’ll want mercy for ALL.

You know in this parable, it seems that the only ones on the outside are those angry over the fact that all are on the inside, that is that everyone gets a denarius. To them, it must seem like the landlord isn't worried about getting the work done because He has no problem offending his hardest workers, or I should say the ones that think themselves to be the hardest workers.

Actually, right now, you may be thinking, "Well, even if this is true, Peter, you shouldn't discuss it in public, because if all get paid the same wage, how will we get any to work the vineyard?" In other words, "Why work? Why not sin that Grace may abound?" "Why imitate our heavenly Father? Why be good? Why surrender to the will of the Bridegroom, if not for a wage?"

Do we hear what we're saying?

The early workers are offended at the Master's Grace and they're jealous of those that haven't been doing His will (the will of Love). They don't have compassion for sinners. They're jealous of sinners because they don't have to work the vineyard. The early workers hate working in the vineyard. They hate the Master's will.

Well, what is it, "to work in a vineyard?"

And why would someone want to work there, if not for a wage?

Working in a vineyard is: tending grapes, pruning branches, harvesting, treading the winepress.

It's this:

A *Walk in the Clouds* video clip is shown:

The scene opens with people at a nighttime festival, lined up in the hundreds, with torches lit and slowly waving great fans. The scene narrows in on the landowner's daughter—Victoria Aragon. Victoria leans into her groom, Paul, as they both wave their fans. Paul looks at her over her shoulder and she leans back into him.

Then the scene changes to show Paul strenuously harvesting grapes the next morning. Victoria reaches over and grabs his pruning shears and shows him how to easily snip a bunch. Paul laughs as she moves back to her own.

The scene changes again to show a huge vat with a bunch of people dancing inside it in a circle. Everyone is singing and dancing outside it with a band playing as they stomp the grapes.

Song: *Crush the grapes! Crush the grapes!*

The scene focuses in on Paul and Victoria facing each other in the middle of a wine vat. People dance around them. The couple smiles and they move towards each other to kiss.

I might work in that vineyard for free. You may think, "Okay, . . . you were going strong, Peter, but that's just a silly movie clip."

Song of Solomon chapter 7, verse 8. (Remember: We talked about it last week; "Holy of Holies") The prince speaks:

May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine.

Then the beloved speaks:

May the wine go straight to my lover, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – there I will give you my love.

If you're a student of Scripture, you may remember that "the beloved" was a servant or slave girl (one of "the last." She's made to work in the vineyard by her brothers – probably Solomon's vineyard.) Yet, she herself is a vineyard, and she's fallen in love with Solomon and gives him the fruit of her vineyard.

At the end, she sings: Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, O Solomon. In other words, this fruit is free. As you know, Solomon is the "son of David," and a picture of Christ. And then this is a picture of the Bride of Christ – one servant girl, The Church.

Isaiah 5: 1-6

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.

Isaiah prophesies amazing things about this winepress.

Isaiah 5:7

The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight (NIV –New International Version).

The Lord looks for good fruit, but sees only bad. On the cross, they offered Jesus "sour wine" and He refused. So Isaiah prophesies judgment on the vineyard. In Isaiah chapter 6, he prophesies that it will be burned right down to "the stump." He says, the "Holy seed is it's stump." That's the root of David."

In chapter 27, Isaiah writes,

“In days to come, Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit . . . this is the full fruit of the removal of his sin” (Isaiah 27: 7, 9 ESV, English Standard Version), the fruit of mercy.

So Israel is a vineyard, and we are the Israel of God, the church, the kingdom is a vineyard, and the Lord calls us to come work in it. To do His work is to obey His commandments, keep the law, but there are different ways of keeping the Law. If you work for a wage, then you are: A tenant, an employee, a servant girl, a maid, or a harlot. But, if you work for another reason, another *logos*, you’re something else. It’s the same work, but an entirely different reality.

Ever After (A Cinderella Story clip is shown.)

[Prince Henry is standing before his castle facing Danielle de Barbarac, grasping her hands and speaking tenderly to her.]

Prince Henry: *I kneel before you not as a prince, but as a man in love.* (He kneels down before her as she watches in silence).

(The prince reaches down slowly to take off her shoe)

Prince Henry: *But I* (He removes the old shoe) *would feel like* (the shoe comes off fully and he looks up) *a king . . .*

Danielle De Barbarac: (Laughs quietly as he bends again to her foot.)

Prince Charming: *A king if you,* (Danielle starts to cry.) *Danielle de Barbarac, . . .* (He looks in her eyes and she looks up in astonishment.) *would be my wife.*

(He then slides on the new silver shoe as Danielle laughs and cries.)

See continuation of clip on next page.

The scene shifts to a *Maid in Manhattan* clip:

[JLo, playing Marissa, is shown in a hotel maid's uniform facing Ralph Feinnes, as Chris Marshall, a hotel guest and introducing herself as her son stands by and watches them.)

Marissa: *Marissa Ventura, housekeeping.*

Chris: *Chris Marshall, candidate for Senate. I'd appreciate your vote.*

Marissa: (Through a small close lipped smile.) *We'll see.*

[The sound of the door being unlocked and opened sounds in the background as they lean in for a kiss.]

Guy: *Good Morning!*

(Flash bulbs go off and reporters call out as they are lost in their kiss.)

Reporter: *Mr. Marshall, over here! Mr. Marshall!*

The scene shifts to *Pretty Woman* clip:

[Richard Gere, as Edward Lewis, and Julia Roberts, as Vivian, look deeply into each other's eyes as they talk.]

Edward: *What happened after?*

(The scene backs up to show Vivian at the base of a ladder as he faces her and continues to speak.)

Edward: *He climbed up the tower and rescued her.*

Vivian: *She rescues him right back.*

Edward: (Smiling gently, he leans in and they kiss passionately.)

A *Walk in the Clouds* clip 2

(Scene opens on a sunny day with the old man, the landowner, Don Pedro Aragon, walking up a hill with Keanu Reeves (playing the part of Paul) walking behind him to a vine encircled by a fence with a monument standing behind it.)

Don Pedro Aragon: *All our vines come from this one. (Waving broadly at the grape vine within the fenced area.) It's not just the root of Las Rubles, it's the root - of our lives, of Victoria's life. Now that you're a part of all this, a part of us, it is the root - of your life. (He points at Paul. Then he walks up face to face to Paul.) You are an orphan - no longer. (He smiles gently.)*

Cinderella stops working for a wage, but she'll still work, she'll still serve – not as a slave, but a princess. The maid in Manhattan will still cook and clean for the very same guy. She'll do the same work, but not for a wage. She's no longer a maid – but a bride.

Pretty Woman will no longer have sex for a wage. She'll no longer roll over and say, "What do I get?" - Same work – but not as a harlot, but a bride.

Keanu Reeves (Paul Sutton) is no longer an orphan, for, he's part of the root – grafted into the family – just like the prodigal son who returned home. Remember the love of that Father transformed him from an employee into a son.

See . . . I don't think God wants employees, but sons.
He doesn't want mercenaries, but children.
He doesn't want slave girls, maids, and harlots, He wants a bride.
I don't think He wants a business, but a family.

What do you want? A wage?
Is that why you work the vineyard?
If so, maybe you're not really even working the vineyard.

Do you know what the vineyard is producing? This vineyard bears fruit. The fruit is grapes. I think they are like grapes of wrath, for the grapes are placed in a winepress and trampled. The grapes are crushed, they bleed, and that blood turns to wine. That wine must be mercy. Jesus said, "*I desire mercy . . . for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*" He's quoting Hosea. Remember Hosea was commanded to marry a harlot, and then shower her with mercy that she might be redeemed, for that was what God was doing with Israel – His vineyard. The fruit of this vineyard is mercy, *Hesed*—covenant love.

If the workers serve the vineyard, they will serve its produce. They will do the work of servant girls, maids, and harlots, but full of *Hesed*—covenant love. They will be married, they will be brides, like law filled with love, they will be workers filled with mercy, the very blood of the landlord, they will be sons. The vineyard is producing children, brides, sons, - family filled with the wine of the covenant: forgiven people full of Grace, the very life-blood that flows from the broken heart of the Father hanging on a tree. The vineyard is producing mankind in the image and likeness of God.

And who is God? God is Love – Love that won't quit, Love that won't fail, Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, on a cross, on a hill that is a vineyard.

The vineyard is producing Mercy.

The landlord is showing mercy on the “Idle, unfruitful” workers.

And now it turns out the workers, who worked all day and complained, were “idle and unfruitful” as well. They thought they were working the vineyard, but they didn’t even know what it was producing. The Pharisees thought they were working the vineyard, but they hated the wine it produced.

Isaiah 63, Revelation 14 and 19 – The wine is blood and the blood is wine. It’s the Grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It’s the Revelation of Love; the Revelation of God, which is also the revelation of our bad judgment.

The Lord says, “Is your eye evil because I am good?”

They hate what the vineyard is producing.

They hate the will of God –They hate God, in the name of God.

They weren’t working for Him, but against Him.

They weren’t working for Him, but for a wage.

They didn’t want to be sons, but employees.

They didn’t want to be family, but tenants.

They didn’t want to be the bride, but the whore.

So I ask, “Does the revelation of God’s grace through Christ Jesus our Lord make you angry?” If so, you ought to ask, “Have I been working for a wage? Am I the bride, or the great harlot?” Do I even like God, let alone love God, the God, who is love?”

If you feel condemned, ask for mercy and you will have mercy. You believe mercy and you will give mercy to all. In other words, you’ll work the vineyard; you’ll preach the Gospel.

I try to preach the Gospel, but it often hurts . . . a lot, and I often do it for the wage.

June 8th, this summer, I was having a really hard day. Seven years have been hard, but on that day, I had just learned how one of my children had suffered alone. I felt like a terrible father, and I thought maybe I should just quit.

This will give you an idea of my “deep spirituality,” and the nature of my “secret garden of prayer.” I was going to the bathroom and I just kept praying: “You have to speak to me. You have to speak to me. You have to speak to me.” I was on the toilet praying: “You have to speak to me.” “Why won’t you speak to me?” I reached down and picked up a Bible sitting on the weight scale praying, “You have to speak to me.” The Bible fell open in my hands and my eyes landed on this verse,

Ezekiel 2:1 -7

And he said to me,

“Son of man, stand upon your feet and I will speak with you.”

I couldn't stand on my feet because I was too amazed that He was speaking to me, because I was taking care of business. Many claim that the Reformation started when Martin Luther received a revelation of grace in the Wittenberg Tower toilet, so don't knock it.

"Then he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel,

[I think that includes the church],

to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against me and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The people are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them; and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD. And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious nation) they will know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you sit upon scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear . . ."

At first I thought, "Cool, God speaks to me and He still wants me to preach." Then, secondly, I thought, "Crap, they may not hear." Later God says, "*They won't hear.*" Well, Ezekiel prophesies that Israel worships idols in secret. (Ezekiel 2:14) (Maybe we American Evangelical Christians worship an idol in secret – our own will, our pride.) Ezekiel then prophesies that Jerusalem has made herself a harlot. (Ezekiel 2: 16) He also prophesies that all Israel must be destroyed. (Ezekiel 2: 22) He then prophesies that all Israel will be raised from their graves, and God will replace their hearts of stone with a heart of flesh- a new will, a good free will, even His Spirit. (Ezekiel 2: 36, 37)

Well, anyway, I thought:

1. "Cool!"
2. "Crap, they won't hear." But then,
3. "Hey wait, someone finally does hear, or overhear. In fact, I'm hearing 2500 years later sitting on the toilet." And now y'all are hearing–this morning–in our new building.

Actually, the Sanctuary has heard. And I honestly can't thank God enough for you! And I believe that not just me, but WE are called to preach grace to the church.

See? I think we're supposed to preach from Scripture. And I don't know if the American Evangelical Church will hear, for a generation or so. I don't know if they'll hear, but I pray that the world will overhear and think to themselves, "Hey, maybe God is better than we thought. Maybe the love of Jesus is deeper than I know. Maybe the Spirit is everywhere working the wonders of mercy."

Well, as I was saying, at the start of the parable, no one works the vineyard, and yet all receive mercy. It's just that some don't enjoy the mercy. At first they're burned by the mercy, because they think they deserve a wage. They all receive mercy that they might be merciful.

This whole time they were working the vineyard, the landlord was working them. We work the vineyard and we are the vineyard – the bride called to bear fruit. They all receive mercy that they might be merciful, but, at the start, no one actually works the vineyard.

So who's the first? - The *Protos*? Who starts the flow of all this mercy? Well, it turns out the landlord has a son. Six weeks ago, we studied the parable that follows this parable. The landlord sends His son and all the tenants of the vineyard kill His son- "the *Protos*."

Jesus ends the parable saying, "*The Protos—the first will be last and the last first.*" In some ancient manuscripts, it's also recorded that He said, "*for many are called and few are chosen.*" Jesus also says the same thing at the end of the parable of the wedding feast that we studied five weeks ago, when we realized that all are called (and of course, they are, for He came to call "sinners") "*all are called*" and "*one is chosen to bear the sin of all.*" He is "*Protos and Eschatos*"— first and last—the first who became last, that all might become "*the righteousness of God.*" He is the Holy Seed, the Root of David, the root of your life. The fire comes and destroys all but the root, yet the entire vineyard is hidden in the root.

Matthew 20: 16-19

"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen." Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

Alive!

But on the tree, on the hill, Jesus absorbed the sin of the world. Isaiah writes, "*It was the will of the Lord to crush him*" . . . like a grape.

It was there that "*He trampled the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God alone.*"

It was there that our sin was transformed into God's mercy.

His blood, the Master's blood, flows from that winepress.

Revelation 14: 20 There is enough to fill the land of Israel to "*the depth of a horse's bridle.*"

All the warhorses come to a stop, in an ocean of mercy, as the glory of the Lord covers the earth, like the waters cover the sea. Christ's blood is the fruit of the vineyard and God wills it to flow in your veins.

Communion

So on the night He was betrayed, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, "Take, eat; this is my body given to you. Do it in remembrance of me." And in the same way after supper, He took a cup, and when He'd given thanks, He gave it to them saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again at this fruit of the vine until that day I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

He told us: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, He it is who bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."*

And so, come to the banquet: Drink the wine. Eat the bread. Believe the Gospel.
And we'll preach the gospel!
Amen?

Benediction

At the end of that movie, *A Walk in the Clouds*, Keanu Reeves (Paul), but due to a lack of mercy, a fight, and a fall the vineyard catches on fire. The whole thing burns. It appears that all is lost until Keanu, Paul, ascends the hill called Zion's hill and finds the stump – the root of that original vine, the root of the vineyard. He brings it to the landlord, thinking it's dead and this happens.

A Walk In the Clouds clip 3

[Victoria's father, Don Pedro Aragon, the landowner, is soaking wet and kneeling in front of the vine.]

Don Pedro Aragon: (Gasping) *It's alive!* (He looks to his wife who smiles in wonder and relief.)

(Paul smiles at Victoria.)

Don Pedro Aragon: (Turning to his workers and calling out.) *It's alive! Las Lupas lives!*

[An old man puts his head in his hands and cries. Everyone smiles and hugs in delight. Victoria and Paul smile at each other.]

Don Pedro Aragon: (Kneels down and cuts off a piece the vine.) *This, . . . this is the root . . . of your life, the root of your family.* (He holds the piece of root and looks down at it as he speaks to Paul.)

You are bound to this land, . . . and to this family, . . . by commitment, . . . by honor . . . and by love.

(He looks at Paul.) *Plant it. It will grow.*

That's how I ended the sermon ten years ago, "Plant it, it will grow."
I didn't realize, that first, there would be a fire. But this morning I feel: "It's alive! It's alive!
Perhaps it was necessary, to burn away all my un-forgiveness toward those that are unforgiving. I'm sure it was necessary, to burn away my faith in "Peter is salvation," that I might see "God is salvation." For the whole world, it's necessary to burn us all right down to the root. He is Jesus. And He will grow!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that your Kingdom will come, and that you will be glorified. We thank you that you have invited us to work in your vineyard. Lord, forgive us for thinking that is a curse when, in fact, that is the greatest of all blessings! And you are Good! Lord God we are beginning to believe it: YOU ARE GOOD. In Jesus' name we thank you. Amen.

Believe the Gospel, and you will live the Gospel.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.