

Isaiah 5: 1-7

Matthew 21: 33-46

God's Gifts to Us

The gospel lesson this morning about the parable of the renters and the landowner is at times a difficult parable to understand. However, I think it does have two distinct points.

The first point is that the kingdom of God belongs to those who believe in Jesus.

The second point of the parable is about in one sense being satisfied with what God has given us and using it to the best of our abilities.

A landowner built a vineyard and then hired servants, or renters, to run it. After it had produced a crop, he sent his servants to harvest the rewards of the vineyard. But the renters had different ideas. They wanted the crop for themselves, so they killed the servants.

The landowner sent more servants and the same thing happened. So, he decided to send his son. But the renters even killed the son.

Then Jesus asks of question of the religious leaders who were listening. So, what should the landowner do? The religious leaders said, the landowner should kill the renters and find new ones.

Then Jesus laid a bombshell on them he said:

43* Therefore I tell you; the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."

Jesus was telling the religious leaders that God had given them the nation of Israel, but they had not taken care of it very well. He sent his servant, the prophets, but they had been killed or not listened to. Then God sent his son, Jesus. And Jesus was telling them that he too would be killed. So, then the kingdom of God would be given to others.

And those others would be the gentiles and those who believed that Jesus was the son of God.

The kingdom of God is given to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the one who came from God to deliver us from death and give us salvation.

The religious leaders of Jesus day were more concerned about their own piety that they lost sight of what it means to be in the kingdom of God. They were more concerned about trying to measure up to the set of laws than loving thy neighbour.

Being in the kingdom of God means that we must love God first and then our neighbour. The religious rulers were given the nation of Israel to be taken care of, but instead they heaped all kinds of rules and regulations upon the people.

No one could measure up. But the religious rulers tried to measure up; hence they were more concerned with their own piety than what the people were doing.

Today we as members of the kingdom of God can also fall into this trap. We can get so concerned about our own piety that we forget to love our neighbour. God wants those who are in the kingdom to love God with all our heart and soul and then to love own neighbour as our self.

The kingdom of God is for those who love God and then out of that love, loves one's neighbour.

We are to be like the man in the following:

"Reporters and city officials gathered at a Chicago railroad station one afternoon in 1953. The person they were meeting was the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner. A few minutes after the train came to a stop, a giant of a man - six feet four inches - with bushy hair and a large moustache stepped from the train. Cameras flashed. City officials approached him with hands outstretched. Various people began telling him how honoured they were to meet him.

The man politely thanked them and then, looking over their heads, asked if he could be excused for a moment.

He quickly walked through the crowd until he reached the side of an elderly black woman who was struggling with two large suitcases. He picked up the bags and with a smile, escorted the woman to a bus. After helping her aboard, he wished her a safe journey. As he returned to the greeting party he apologized, "Sorry to have kept you waiting."

The man was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the famous missionary doctor who had spent his life helping the poor in Africa. In response to Schweitzer's action, one member of the reception committee said with great admiration to the reporter standing next to him, "That's the first time I ever saw a sermon walking."

Are you a sermon walking? It's a good phrase. Be a walking sermon proclaiming the kingdom of God through your words and actions. Be a walking sermon as you love your neighbour. Be a walking sermon as you tell others about the kingdom of God and Jesus' love for them.

And I think the second point of this parable is that we are stewards of what God has given us and we need to use our gifts and talents to the best of our abilities.

I would like to look at our unique self and what God has given us and how we use it. God gave the kingdom of Israel to the religious rulers, but they abused their power and did not further the kingdom as God would have liked. So, God sent his Son and they did not believe in him either.

God has given us the kingdom of heaven now through the church on earth. So, the question can be asked, how are we using our God given gifts and talents to further this kingdom on earth.

God has given us gifts to use for His glory. Are you using your gifts to further the kingdom of God? We all have different gift and talents, no one's gift is better than another. God wants us to use those gifts and talents to his glory.

Lawrence Welk who was an American TV star says:

"To be granted some kind of useable talent and to be able to use it to the fullest extent to which you are capable-this, to me, is a kind of joy that is almost unequalled."

Are you using yours? Are you producing fruits?

Amen.