

**Lent5C (3/21/10 – Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Judgment and mercy ... urgency and patience – those are the ways our Savior has been talking with us the last few Sundays. A couple of weeks ago we heard how Pilate murdered Galilean believers as they were offering their sacrifices and how the Tower of Siloam fell on some who dwelt in Jerusalem. Then the Lord Jesus exhorted **us** to repent or likewise perish. Afterward He told the *Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree*. And although He hinted that it might eventually be destroyed if it remained unfruitful ... the main point of the Savior's parable was the longsuffering mercy of God toward us who are too often **unfruitful** occupants in His Vineyard.

Last Sunday we heard the *Parable of the Prodigal and Prideful Sons and Their Compassionate Father*. And there we were made to see how we are like both the prodigal son and the prideful elder son. Sometimes we waste the gifts of God and forsake Him. Other times we think too highly of our own service in the Father's household and resent the Father's mercy toward those who are no worse sinners than we are. In fact, because of our sinful pride, we sometimes risk our own position in the Father's house. Above all, we saw the Father's patient love, mercy, and compassion toward His prodigal and prideful children alike – which is to say, toward us. We saw how the Father eagerly waits for our penitent return – and how He likewise urges us to lay aside our sinful pride and come into the banquet of His eternal mercy and love to celebrate with all the other forgiven sinners.

In the Word of our Lord in the *Holy Gospel* appointed for this ***Fifth Sunday in Lent***, we are once again warned about being unfruitful in the Vineyard of the Lord. Although our Lord Jesus Christ spoke this parable against the scribes and chief priests – as they themselves correctly understood – He also spoke it in the hearing of all the people ... and for our benefit as well. For God has placed each of us into His Vineyard. We each tend that portion where God has planted us – in our daily vocations ... wherever God has placed us. And when the proper time comes, our Lord

demands from us the appropriate fruits of repentance and faith.

But consider how shamefully we treat God's servants – how we neglect the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles and Evangelists of the New. Indeed, how we often neglect and even reject God's holy Word ... and shamefully treat the servants of the Word God sends us. In our personal lives we are no better than the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests, who abused their positions as the spiritual tenants of the Vineyard of God's chosen Israel. Each of us – in our own way – refuses to give to God what is rightfully His ... the fruits of His gracious loan to us ... the fruits of repentance and faith toward Him ... the fruits of mercy and forgiveness toward our neighbors.

God speaks to us in loving warning so that we might repent of our sins and return to Him. But just like the scribes and chief priests who stood there that day and heard this parable of the Lord – we despise His Word ... fail to show Him respect ... and even throw Him and His messengers out of our lives ... at least for a time. That is precisely what we are doing whenever the Word of God speaks clearly against what we do ... and we keep on doing it – whenever the Word of God condemns us in our sin ... and we keep on sinning. It is almost as if we would think: *If I can silence the voice that is judging me, then I am free of condemnation and sin.*

Of course, it doesn't work that way. If we fail to hear and heed God's Holy Word ... fail to obey the Ten Commandments ... fail to produce the fruits of repentance and faith ... disdain God's Holy Word and shamefully treat those He sends to bring His Word to us – well ... the only Word left for us is the promise that the Vineyard Owner ***will come and destroy those tenants and give the Vineyard to others*** ... and the promise that ***Everyone who falls on Christ the Cornerstone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*** [LUKE 20.16, 18]

Our sinful, obstinate rebellion against the divine will of our Lord places us in the same danger as those tenants ... as the scribes and chief priests. And yet, consider well – dear Christians – the actions of the vineyard owner

in our parable. How often our Lord sends His servants to us – time and time again. And above all He has sent His Son. Our gracious God loves to show mercy – and He is quite longsuffering with our waywardness, pride, arrogance, and unfruitfulness. Our Lord *is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance* [2PET 3.9].

*Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You!* Curiously and ironically, the seemingly insane plan of the wicked tenants to kill the Son so that they might inherit the Vineyard is precisely what the Father/Vineyard-Owner intends. In this mundane world that would never work. Not only would the tenants fail to inherit the vineyard, but also they would be prosecuted and sentenced to death – destroyed as our text says. But in the radical mercy of God, the Son’s rejection and murder – His *Good Friday* death on the Cross – are the very means by which **all** people are reconciled to the Father and offered an eternal inheritance in the heavenly Vineyard of our Lord!

*Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You!* God the Father of course knew that the Son would **not** be respected – but rather rejected, beaten, thrown outside the walls of His beloved Jerusalem ... and cruelly crucified. And yet in longsuffering mercy and love He sent Him – to be the Savior of the whole world. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew exactly what was going to happen to Him when He spoke this parable on *Tuesday of Holy Week* – after His triumphal entry on *Palm Sunday* and His cleansing of the Temple. Indeed, our Savior knew before He was baptized in the Jordan and began His public ministry in our behalf or journeyed to Jerusalem and went to His Father’s House at age 12 or ever came into the smallness of human flesh at Christmas. It was decided before the foundations of the world were laid that the Son would be the rejected Cornerstone – a stumbling block of offense to Jews and Gentiles alike ... but chosen and precious in the sight of God the Father. It was necessary – God’s love for us constrained Him. Out of mercy and love the Savior had set His face to go to Jerusalem and be cast out and crucified to atone for the sins of the whole world even before the first creative Word was spoken.

***Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You.*** It is little wonder that the Apostle St. Paul would ***count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus and willingly suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish*** that He might ***gain Christ and be found in Him*** [PHI 3.8-9]. Our Lord and Savior, the Son of the Vineyard Owner, had long ago counted His Own eternal power and glory as loss – for a time – in order that He might gain **for us all** an eternal inheritance in heaven. As radical and unreasonable as the vineyard owner’s decision to send his beloved son, that the wicked tenants might possibly respect him – so radical and unreasonable was our Triune God’s decision to send the Son into our wicked, sin-infested world. And the Father’s righteous wrath against **our** rejection and murder of the Son is poured out ... on the Son!

***Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You.*** This is ***a new thing***, indeed, that the Lord has done [ISA 43.19]. When you are in Christ – by Baptism and faith – the former things are truly forgotten ... the old things no longer considered [43.18]. Behold, you are a new person in Christ – no more a wicked tenant ... but yourself a beloved son or daughter ... and heir of the eternal Vineyard of the Lord. The fruits you fail to produce, the Son Himself has handed over to the Father on your behalf! As the psalmist says: ***He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him*** [PSA 126.6]. Jesus, the Son of God, went forth and wept over Jerusalem and the whole world because of our sin and our sinful rejection of His love. He came bearing the seed of the Gospel in Himself ... and was willingly sown in the dust of death after He was rejected and killed for you. But on ***Easter Sunday*** He rose with shouts of joy ... and 40 days later ascended to His heavenly home, bringing the sheaves – the fruit – of believers with Him to deliver joyfully to the Father. ***Behold, the Son of God, Rejected and Killed for You!*** In Christ the Vineyard does not remain unfruitful, but indeed bears much fruit. For the beloved Son has stretched out His arms on the Cross that He might gather into His heavenly Vineyard a mighty harvest – including you!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]