

A Pentecost 16 2011
Homily on Youth Sunday
Matthew 21:33-46

God must love vineyards.

- They appear over a hundred times in the Bible.
- Wine is mentioned 240 times
- The first thing Noah did after he got off the ark was to plant a vineyard.
- Jesus first miracle was to change water into wine
- Three of his parables were set in a vineyard
- And at the Last supper he lifted a cup of wine and said “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, do this in remembrance of me.”

Last week we heard one of the vineyard parables. The people Jesus told it to didn't get it, so Jesus told them another parable, the one we heard in our Gospel lesson today.

Sometimes we say that a parable is a small story with a large point.

In this parable, it is pretty clear that God is the landowner and that the workers in the vineyard are Israel. Jesus is speaking to a people who claimed to be faithful to God but who were not bearing the fruit of faithfulness. They were not living lives that reflected God's love and faithfulness to God's whole creation and not spreading the kingdom. There had been many warnings throughout history—the kings, judges, and prophets. Now, Jesus, as the Landlord's son, issues the same warning. **Honor the landowner by being faithful workers in the vineyard.**

In less than a week, Jesus died on a cross.

Because this story has been included in Matthew's gospel we need to understand it, not only as a message to Israel in Jesus' day, but also as a challenge to us today.

We too are called to be faithful workers in the vineyard.

Last summer, Bill and I visited our daughter in San Francisco and while there, we of course toured a few vineyards in Napa Valley. Our favorite was a very small vineyard where the workers took time out from their chores to talk about grapes and vines and wine and work in the vineyard.

One of the men we spent time with had been a business school graduate from the Midwest, and had worked in an office for a few years. He had no experience farming or even, I'm guessing, with manual labor.

Somehow he stumbled into working in this vineyard and he had clearly fallen in love with the work and the life.

"I can't imagine doing anything else. I can't wait to get up in the morning and I hate to leave in the evening." And then wine, he loved to talk about the wine and all that he had learned from their 80 some year old wine master.

Honestly he had the enthusiasm of an evangelist.

This was an organic vineyard which meant doing many things by hand, including handpicking pests off the leaves, but clearly this guy loved his work and the fruit of his labor.

In God's kingdom we are all workers in the vineyard.

The Biblical word for a worker in the vineyard is "**steward.**"

We are all **stewards** and guess what; today's parable of the vineyard is ultimately... a stewardship sermon!

We are **stewards of everything** we have and enjoy,
and owners of nothing.

And we are stewards of the gospel, (i.e.) the good news of God's love, for all, in Jesus Christ.

Today is Youth Sunday. In worship today, we are hearing about our youth's "**stewardship**" in Ohio and in Guatemala.

By serving others, caring for the poor and making positive friendships with those in need **and by** building homes for the destitute, these youth, these **stewards** in the kingdom, are **not only** sharing their wealth and their time and labor, but they are **also** sharing the gospel.

Their enthusiasm can serve as both challenge and inspiration to all of us to consider how we are doing as **stewards** in God's vineyard.

What kind of relationship do we have with the owner of the vineyard? Are we willingly working for and sharing the fruits of our labor. Are we like that guy in Napa who can hardly wait to get to work in God's vineyard? Are we as enthused about the gospel as he is about wine?

Being a good **steward** in the kingdom was never meant to be a burden.

Sharing God's gifts of time, resources and abilities brings not only a future reward in heaven but is a blessing right now, in this place at this time.

See it in the faces of our youth, in their stories, in their passion, their joy.
There you will find the **good news of the stewardship** in God's vineyard.
There you will find the **good news of the gospel**.