

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple  
Sunday, October 4, 2020

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### **Matthew 21:33-46**

**33** “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. **34** When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. **35** But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. **36** Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. **37** Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ **38** But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ **39** So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. **40** Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” **41** They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

**42** Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;<sup>[a]</sup>  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes’?

**43** Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.<sup>[b]</sup> **44** The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”<sup>[c]</sup>

**45** When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. **46** They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

This is the word of the Lord.

To set today’s scripture lesson in the greater context of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus has asked those around him, “Who do people say that I am?”

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He heard that most see him as a prophet - like John the Baptist or Elijah. The people didn't *get* him, nor did they understand God's gracious abundance untethered by his power. Jesus pushes those closest to him, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter confesses, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

It's that confession, that "Jesus is Lord" that led Jesus to establish the church, to build it on a solid rock. Peter modeled, in a moment of clarity, the truth he knew in Jesus as God's son, living with them, now - resurrected, living with us. Jesus is the cornerstone on which we stand and when we are at our best sharing the fruit of God's Kingdom. Jesus is the cornerstone from which justice flows down like waters and whose peace permeates our hearts.

At Idlewild, we state that our mission as the church is to pursue, personify, and practice as Presbyterians the good news of reconciliation and salvation in Christ through worship, formation, nurture, and outreach.

When we pursue, personify and practice as Presbyterians, we share the fruits of God's Kingdom and trust in Jesus as our sure foundation.

*Or do we? Or maybe the question is better asked, "How are we sharing the fruits of God's Kingdom?"*

Prior to today's bible story, Jesus has already entered Jerusalem, a city in turmoil, and inside the Temple he found more consumerism, bartering, not sharing, more than contemplation. He found distraction from the ways of God, selling, and buying, not sharing. This led Jesus to rage. Turning over tables, and judging those inside the Temple, Jesus turns to the healing work of God. Those inside, who held the earthly power became angry and fearful of Christ.

*Who do you say Jesus is?*

Today's story focuses on a parabolic teaching about God's Kingdom. This story invites the light of God's truth in Christ to shine and the Holy Spirit to dismantle our comfort.

The teaching is not about the quantum of production, but instead, about the intention and practice of sharing the fruits of God's Kingdom.

*Who do we say Jesus is? How do our lives, our words and actions, model the sharing of the fruits of God's Kingdom?*

The design of the vineyard described in today's scripture would make for a cover spread and feature article in *Garden and Gun*. The stones have been cleared from the soil and the land tilled. The fence is built to keep the abundant fruit secure at harvest, and the prolific vines from being trampled. The watchtower gives security at the horizon where the land meets the sky. All is secure. The property and its potential have been entrusted to the caretakers, the tenants.

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At the harvest, the expectation is for the fruits to be shared and abundance celebrated. The landowner sends his people, even his son, to help to share in the harvest. Instead of rejoicing over the bounty, and sharing joyfully, the vineyard becomes a place of violence. The fire of greed consumed the caretaker's hearts.

*I wonder where I've missed the beauty, and sharing, of God's abundance?*

Sean Deitrich writes a blog called *Sean of the South*. He sees and describes the abundance in God's Kingdom, here on earth, though he doesn't use those words. He sees abundance shared between real people and describes it. Sometimes it's funny, but often he catches the truth of what it means to be human the way Isaiah knew a hot coal.

This week he told the story of a group of car dealership mechanics who rescued a kitten trapped behind a car's dashboard. He describes burly, tattooed mechanics coaxing a kitten and stretching their bulky arms into too small spaces that only kittens dare to go. He shared the description about a rescue of sorts. For the sake of an innocent creature, gruff, burly men, worked together for the joy of the fruit of freedom's release. And after the rescue, the lives of strangers - a minivan family and burly shop mechanics - were woven together in a particular moment, capturing the abundance of joy, a fruit of God's good abundance.

*I like reading about these good things.*

Those mechanics, or at least the shop owner, gave away hundreds of dollars in labor to solve a problem. Their sharing knit lives together in a new way.

Frederick Buechner says that humanity is like an enormous spider web. Any touch to that web sets it trembling because our lives are linked together. Looking at a web in the wind, we can imagine how interconnected we are. That is how the Holy Spirit works with the fruit of the Spirit.

The church is like that too. There is the big "C" church, and the little "c" church. The big "C" church is the church that Jesus established with Peter. Although strangers, as members of the Big C church, our lives are linked together by the Holy Spirit.

It's not what we do and what we produce, but how God works through us sharing and caring in Christ's name.

God is a God of all nations and all people. Today, Christ's table is set with cloth, beadwork and pitchers collected from around the world. These items help us to remember that the church of Jesus Christ is not just Idlewild, here in Memphis, - not just Tennessee or the United States, but all of us, who entrust our lives to Christ, a living Lord, interconnected in God's good world.

We Christians don't all look alike, sound alike, or even worship in the same way. We don't sing the same songs or pray precisely in the same way.

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We do place our trust in Jesus Christ.  
We do, at our best, share the fruits of God's Kingdom.  
We do hold hope in God's good story.

We are linked and committed to one another because of God's work in Christ Jesus.

I see this in this church, at Idlewild.

Some of us are being shaped in formation experiences of looking inward with racial roadmaps - and sharing the truth of who we are.

As we move to the offering, and then to God's Table, I invite you to reflect upon an intentional way you might share the fruit of God's Kingdom. As we reflect, participants from the global church join their perfectly imperfect voices as one, to remind us of one of the fruits of God's Kingdom - Peace.

When Christ's peace is known, and lifted up, all come and share and serve in his love and justice.

I pray we will be shaped to share in the fruits of the Spirit - it starts person by person, and in grows in community. Might it be so, especially through us with the power of the Holy Spirit.