

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 18, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Luke 20:9-19 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

14 "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!"

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone'?"

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

"Salvation over Self-Interest"

We are all under a lot of pressure. To compare ourselves to others. To live up to ridiculous, artificial standards. So that's probably why we are hearing more and more people saying to us: "You Do You." You don't want to be anyone else. You don't want to try to be them. You want to be yourself. And if you don't take care of yourself, it's hard to be strong for your family or dependable for your co-workers or a resource for your friends who are struggling. You do have to take care of yourself or you will end up turning into a mess. Then you're no good to yourself or anyone else who is relying on you.

A recent self-help book with the title "You Do You" carries the subtitle "How to Be Who You Are and Use What You've Got to Get What You Want." The author gives her readers the advice to stand up for who they are, go after what they really want. It's ok to be selfish. Don't let anyone boss you around. Only do the things you normally do. Nothing more. Nothing less. You do you.

When you're pressured to be something you're not or do something you don't feel comfortable doing, you do you can be great advice. There is a dangerous downside to that

phrase too. If you are led and controlled exclusively by your own desires, it's a problem. When you shut out any voices that offer legitimate concern for your welfare, you put yourself at risk. And in Luke chapter 20, Jesus points out the dangers of such self-interest. By telling the Parable of the Tenants, Jesus is giving us a vivid picture of God's patient and persistent love. In a world full of hostility, God's love finds a way. No matter how much we get wrapped up in ourselves, God is still focused on what is best for you. At a time when we are under pressure to be all kinds of things, God's salvation finds a way.

A vineyard would have been a familiar picture for Jesus' original audience. In a place where rain is scarce and growing anything green takes great effort, a vineyard would be a very valuable piece of real estate. Throughout the Old Testament it's a great picture for God and his people. (cf Isaiah 5:7) God builds Israel and creates. He entrusts the leaders to be faithful stewards by working and improving and producing fruit in it. And the fruit he expects are the products of his covenant relationship with them and the fruits of faith.

But Jesus wasn't just teaching general information to help the crowds in Jerusalem pass their end of the year Bible exams. Jesus teaches this parable on the Tuesday after Palm Sunday. Already the pilgrims are flocking to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Jesus is in the temple area engaged in some serious teaching. And those crowds that swell Jerusalem to the limits are eager to connect with Jesus. So now there is an almost explosive hysteria surrounding Jesus as he teaches in the temple courtyards on this Tuesday of Holy Week.

Well, not everyone is so excited. As excited and hopeful as some are, others are just as bitter and hateful. Jesus' very presence grows more and more divisive. The people in control of Israel's religious life were on the other end of that divisiveness. Jesus didn't match up with their expectations at all. He defied their standards of what a good, moral teacher should do when he associated with sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes. He infuriated their leadership when he flaunted their rules about daily piety that were meant to form an extra layer of security around God's commandments in the Bible. Jesus just didn't fit into their mold for what a respectable believer should be. They certainly felt forced to reject him as God's anointed rescuer. So Jesus tells this parable for their benefit. It's his way of giving them one last chance.

We could say that these teachers of the law and chief priests were just being themselves. The members of the Sanhedrin were locked into their own system. And so they were probably saying to each other "you do you." And when Jesus was critical of the way they lived and what they taught, well, Jesus was just being a hater. And if you are focused on just doing your thing and haters are gonna hate, then you just shrug them off as best you can. When they try to get you to be something you aren't, you don't have to listen to them. They are just being negative. And negative people aren't worth your time. You shouldn't seriously consider their opinions or waste any time on their criticism. You don't need to rethink anything you are already doing. You just do you.

What happens when you can't squeeze Jesus into your mentality that says "you do you"? This isn't just something that affects Pharisees. You do you spirituality is the default mode of the human heart. When it comes to building your own spirituality, you feel like you have to be yourself. When you need to come up with your own morality and system of ethics, you do you. You can choose whether you want to believe in heaven or hell, which sacred texts and inspirational leaders mean the most to you. Don't let anyone tell you what you have to be. Even if you have been a Christian for years, you still have to do you. God's Word is important, but you get to decide what parts of it you want to listen to and how often you consult it. Sometimes God's messengers today are still a little over the top, a little too zealous, just a tad bit too strict. The Bible, the whole message of Christianity is important to you. But you get to decide how high you want to place it on your priority list. You gotta do you. And you still have to be yourself even when you take your faith more seriously than anything else in life and being in church is a major goal for each week. You do you when you look at all those other supposed Christians who can't be bothered to show up for church, who just can't find it in themselves to interrupt their lives for God, who expect everyone else to serve them. When you're entitled to get at least a little disgusted when everyone else sets such low expectations for themselves.

God doesn't care if you want to call him a hater. God is patient and persistent. God makes his appeal again and again. He sends servant after servant. But there comes a time when God's compassion and patience reach their limits.

When the parable ends, Jesus pauses. Jesus lets the tension reach its peak. Jesus makes the connection between this parable and the audience around him for them. Then he quotes a well-known psalm for them: **"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."** (Luke 20:17) Now matter what people think of Jesus, no matter how they choose to deal with him, God will build something new. And Jesus tells of the two different reactions of people who reject him: **"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."** (Luke 20:18) Some won't be able to see Jesus as the promised Messiah. They will stumble on the stone. Some will go through life without any use for Jesus. Maybe never seriously considering Jesus at all. In the end, God's judgment will still fall on them. It will be a fatal crushing.

That's not what people want to hear when they are focused on you-do-you spirituality. There was no problem for the crowd to understand what Jesus was talking about. It was crystal clear for them: **"The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them."** (Luke 20:19) It was so clear that their anger boiled over against Jesus to the point it could barely be contained. They had the urge to arrest Jesus right then and there. And by their rage they were only justifying the harshest and most severe parts of the parable. Who are the haters now?

There couldn't be a sharper contrast between those leaders and the view of God we get in Jesus' parable. Jesus describes God as the master who is patient and persistent to the point where anyone else would call him foolish. The rental agreement called for the farmers to give the vineyard owner a portion of their harvest. But when the owner's servant appear to

collect, they beat him and sent him away with nothing. Any other owner would have called the police, prosecuted those abusive tenants to the full extent of the laws and would not have rested until they were brought to justice. Instead this owner sends a second servant. This one isn't just beaten, but insulted too. So he sends a third. This one gets serious wounds for his troubles and gets tossed out of the vineyard. This picture of God is already without precedent in the history of human interaction. Any other owner would have responded with anger and vengeance and violence. And no one would have questioned his justice.

Then he does the unthinkable. He makes one last appeal based on compassion: **“What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.”** (Luke 20:13) Perhaps?! After they had abused and mistreated the servants? After they demonstrated Allstar level arrogance and super selfishness, perhaps they will now show some respect? If this was my vineyard, I wouldn't try anything more without some kind of guarantee of a favorable response. If it were my son, I wouldn't proceed without a high probability of a successful result. Perhaps isn't much to go on. Yet this is the most vivid glimpse into the heart of God, his thinking toward the human race. This is how far God is willing to go. His love will find a way to overcome sinful self-interest.

That makes it ok to call him your Master. That makes it ok for you to do some serious editing to your You-Do-You spirituality. You have something better than building your identity on just being yourself. You have a Lord whose very heart breaks over the rejection and self-centeredness of every human heart. You have a Lord and Savior who wouldn't rest until he tried everything possible to secure your salvation. You have God's own Son who went into that hostile situation for you. You have a God who didn't shy away from confrontation, but incorporated the rejection of those supposed leaders into his plan to rescue the human race. And so they plotted against God's Son. They threw him out of Jerusalem. They executed him there on Calvary. That's how far God was willing to go to conquer your self-interest to give you salvation. And now you can find your value in what Christ did for you.

And that means you don't have to let anyone boss you around. But you get a Lord who transforms hearts by his redeeming love. You don't have to try to be someone else, because you are God's prized possession. Be who God says you are. Jesus is your cornerstone. He is the foundation for your life. The church is built on Jesus and on Jesus alone. Don't try to live up to anyone else's expectations. You are the recipient of God's patient and persistent love in Jesus Christ. In you Jesus is building something new. Jesus governs every angle and every aspect of this new construction.

In this world where nothing seems certain and tragedy seems to rule, you need a foundation. Jesus is your King of kings and Lord of lords. He is your life's essential foundation for every day and for your eternal salvation. Amen.