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“Who Does That? God Does. For You.”

Text: Matthew 21:33-46 (Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 3:4b-14)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

***They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”***

That’s what we would do. And for a lot less than the owner of the vineyard. We have, in fact. Someone wrongs us, we wrong them. You hurt me, I hurt you. Revenge. Tit for tat. An eye for an eye. And if not outwardly, then in our hearts. Silently stewing over the wrong inflicted on us. Plotting a payback that we might never do, but delight in planning and dreaming of anyway. Maybe someone at work or at school takes credit for something you did. Someone cuts you off in traffic. Or, you let someone in and you don’t get your wave! <Grumble!> Or that time you went out of your way for someone and you didn’t even get a thank you - like, their royal highness was entitled to your service! What is it for you? That causes all that self-righteous indignation to swell up in your heart and make you want to lash out at such ungrateful wretches?

So, for what these tenants did? Yeah, that’s what they deserve. The owner gave them so many chances. *Too many*, maybe we would say. Sending servant after servant after servant, and then finally his son. And those tenants just kept getting worse. They finally pushed him too far. They can go to hell. That’s what we would do . . . and so we think that’s what God would do too. Or *should* do. It even said that in the prophet Isaiah - all wild grapes and no good grapes? You’re out.

So there is a word of warning for us here, if we think our sin doesn’t matter. If we think we can produce all the wild and sinful grapes we want in God’s vineyard. Israel is the example - when they pushed God too far, what Isaiah prophesied happened: the armies of the enemies of Israel came up against them, defeated them in battle, and hauled them off as prisoners of war; they were exiled from the land God had promised to give them. For it was not their walls of stone and weapons of war that was their strength and protection - God was their wall, their hedge, their fortress. And without Him, all wild grapes and no good grapes, they went down.

So yeah, that’s what they deserve. And truth be told, *it is what we deserve too*.

But here’s where this dialogue - between Jesus and the chief priests and the Pharisees - takes a surprising turn, with Jesus’ answer. For He doesn’t agree with the chief priests and the Pharisees and their answer and evaluation of the situation. It’s not that their

answer was wrong - we've seen already what happened to Old Testament Israel - it's just that their answer was *incomplete*. So it's almost like after their answer, Jesus pauses for a moment, a dramatic silence, and then speaks: But . . . ***have you never read in the***

***Scriptures:***

***“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes”?***

You see, like us, the Pharisees knew their Law. The Law is our native language. It is written in our hearts. It's the atmosphere we grow up in. It's what we know - that it's a dog-eat-dog world out there. Like us, they knew what *should* happen to sinful, ungrateful, self-righteous wretches. What they didn't know and needed to learn *was the Gospel*. Passages like this one. That God is so utterly unlike us that we need to rethink everything we thought we knew, and realize how *marvelous* our Father in heaven is.

So Jesus quotes these words from Psalm 118. That ***the stone the builders rejected***, the stone that was not good enough and so was rejected and thrown out into the scrap heap, God not only takes and uses, but has made ***the cornerstone*** - the most important stone in the whole building; the stone off of which the rest of the building depends and is built off of. It is a new life, *a resurrection* of sorts, for that stone. *And this was the plan all along*. What was written in the Psalms was happening now. Jesus is going to be rejected and thrown out with the trash, onto the scrap heap of humanity, on the cross, but would then become the cornerstone. ***This was the Lord’s doing***, the Psalm said. The plan all along.

Except that doesn't seem to agree with the parable, where the owner sends his son thinking that ***“they will respect my son.”*** But here is exactly where the parable surprises us and begins to change our thinking. For the word Jesus uses here, for respect, actually has two meanings. It is like our English word *cleave* - what does that word mean? Well, it has two opposite meanings, actually. It can mean to cut apart and separate, like a *meat cleaver*. Or, it can mean to join together, like when a man *cleaves* to his wife. Jesus' word here, in Greek, is like that - it can mean either respect **or shame**. But which do we pick? Does the owner of the vineyard really think they will *respect* his son after all they had done to the servants he had sent before? Unlikely. *They will shame my son* is much more probable, and is, in fact, exactly what happens.

***But who does that?*** Who sends their son knowing he will be shamed, or worse? . . . **God does**. That's exactly what God did. He sent His Son to be rejected, to be shamed, to be thrown out with the trash, in order to take Him from the scrap heap, from the grave, and raise Him back to life as the cornerstone - the stone upon which His whole Church is built. God doesn't do what we would do or think He *should* do - **He does this!** This marvelous, wonderful, work instead.

And so Old Testament Israel was defeated in battle and hauled off and exiled - yes - but our marvelous, wonderful God brought them back again. A new life, a resurrection, of sorts.

And this is why we read words from Psalm 118 at the graveside of a Christian - this body that has been defeated in death is not without hope! For in Christ Jesus there is life from the dead. Resurrection. Hope. The forgiveness of sins.

But it's not just for when you die - Jesus is holding this out to the chief priests and Pharisees and you and me *even now*. For, He goes on to explain: ***The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*** The time for crushing, the Last Day, is coming. That's what we think should happen now - to ungrateful, self-righteous wretches. We want to crush them! Make them pay. But not Jesus. He paid. For us. Now is the time to fall and be broken. To fall down in repentance for our wild grapes, for our judgmental hearts, for our taking Jesus' cross-won-forgiveness for granted. To be broken in seeing that we are, in fact, the very ones we judge! And its not pleasant to be broken. I remember when I was lying on the ground with a concussion and a broken collarbone after crashing my bike. It wasn't pleasant. And you and me, with our sins, are broken much worse than that.

But to those who fall and are broken by the Law, there is resurrection and new life in Jesus. The forgiveness of your sins. But again, *who does that? Who forgives ungrateful, selfish, greedy tenants after they sin and kill the son?* God does. Now, in this time of grace. Washing us and our children with the waters of baptismal forgiveness and new life. Announcing to us the new life and resurrection of forgiveness every time we broken sinners gather here after another week of wild grapes . . . and we are absolved. And then even more, not just grudgingly sending us back out as servants into His vineyard to make up for what we've done, but giving us a seat at His Table, and serving and feeding us with the Body and Blood of His Son. To build you and me on that cornerstone. The One we shamed honoring us.

*Who does that?* Your Father does. Once the apostle Paul realized that, it changed his life. As we heard in the Epistle, he thought he was somebody. He had out-achieved everybody. He was the top dog in Judaism. He had accomplished so much. No one could boast more than he could. But once he fell over Jesus and learned the truth, nothing else mattered anymore. Everything else is **rubbish**, Paul said! Everything else is rubbish once Christ makes you His own.

For that's what God does, and what He has done **for you**. Giving you His Son, giving You His Spirit, that you be His own. Not to go on sinning and producing more wild grapes! *Who does that?* Yes, that's what we do. But as wretched as we are, we have an even more amazing, marvelous, wonderful Father, who shamed his Son to honor us. Who

breaks us in order to raise us. That's what He does. That we not be crushed in the end, but live in His kingdom, His vineyard, forever.

The chief priests and Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus for speaking such things. Jesus was the broken one, not them! Well, once again, they were half right. Jesus *was* broken, **for them**. And **for you**. To heal the broken, forgive the sinner, and raise the dead. So come now and receive all that at His Table, here. That amazing, marvelous love of God **for you**. That receiving the fruit of the vine here, the very Blood and forgiveness of your Saviour, you now go with a new life and produce good fruits too.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

*(I am indebted to the Rev. Bruce Keseman for his insight into the respect/shame turn of this parable.)*