

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 2nd October 2005

Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Exodus 20.1-4, 7-9, 12-20
- Psalm 19 (Hymn 7)
- Philippians 3
- Matthew 21.33-46

text is available at <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/lectionary/APentecost/aProper20.htm>

Sunday 2nd October 2005 - The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

- Religious Tradition
- Racial Purity
- Right family
- Right education
- Right living...

These were all the things Paul held dear **UNTIL** he knew "The value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" and then all that he had previously held dear was rubbish — *skubala* — it was sweepings from the circus floor — *pause* — SSh... surely it was manure!

He had truly been liberated from all the pretensions of class, race, etc.

This is surely where we begin if we want to be useful productive tenants in God's vineyard.

"Australia rides on the sheep's back" was a saying of years gone by — It was a depiction of how people saw our country — dependent on the wool industry.

The vineyard was for the people of Jesus' day the way they

saw themselves. The stone rejected by the builders is also an image of the Messiah.

The story of the vineyard of God was a familiar picture from the prophets — as Isaiah the prophet had said many years before "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel".

The whole idea of Israel — land and people as the Lord's vineyard also appeared in the works of other prophets Hosea (10.1) Ezekiel (19: 10-14) and Jeremiah. So there was from ancient times the prevailing image of Israel as "God's vineyard".

Isaiah pictured this vineyard as something God loved; something God prepared, cared for, protected.

It was also meant to produce a crop! and wine!

BUT so the story goes in Isaiah God saw *NOT* grapes for wine or eating — *BUT* wild grapes!

The expectation of God for the vineyard was that the outcome of all the planting and the care would produce a people whose output would be justice (fairness, equity at all levels of society); and righteousness (a relationship of faithfulness to God.)

Instead of Justice — the people produced bloodshed.

Instead of Righteousness — the people cried out (for justice)

So the expectations of high standards for God's people were not met way back over 500 years before Jesus.

A succession of prophets attempted to preach a message of justice and righteousness.

So it is this image Jesus recalls as he speaks to the "chief priests and the pharisees" **AND** when he talks about the tenants seizing the slaves of the master and treating them badly he refers to the rejection of the prophets teaching and their mistreatment.

The patterns would be repeated with the Son of the owner. The rightful inheritor of the property would not just be treated badly — he would be killed! And Jesus points to murder as well as robbery perpetrated by those who wanted power.

The chief priests and pharisees condemn themselves when they pronounce judgement on the tenants in the story!

and Jesus, quoting another piece of the OT scripture recalls that the rejected one becomes the one who is crucial to God's purpose.

Suddenly the chief priests and pharisees realize that Jesus is speaking of them as the bad, unproductive tenants of the vineyard.

As people in power and having the authority of leadership, the religious and political leaders of Jesus' day had largely failed — the mention that the tenants wanted to kill the heir "and get his inheritance" was an inference that they wanted power and ownership even at the expense of abandoning their ancient faith.

Well, the chief priests and the pharisees recognize that Jesus is speaking about them, but instead of being repentant they want to arrest and silence Jesus! (Silence all opposition! How often do we see that?)

If the chief priests and pharisees recognize that Jesus was speaking to them **WE** ought to realize that he is also speaking to us!

What then is the Vineyard? — the World?

I believe it is our area of responsibility:

- community
- work place
- family
- church
- neighbourhood

And what does Jesus look for: love, preparation. protection, care,

so that the vineyard can produce the fruit of justice (a fair go for all, not just for ourselves) and righteousness (that deep awareness of and abiding faithfulness to God.)

