

The Rev. Erin Hensley
Oct. 2, 2011
Propers 22A

Real Fruit

While before crowds in the temple, the chief priests and elders have asked Jesus about the origin of his authority to teach. They feign interest, hoping to regain some power. Jesus responds with three parables, the first of which was our gospel lesson for last Sunday and the second is in the gospel reading for today. Like those gathered in the temple thousands of years ago, we are bystanders in this long encounter between the religious leaders and Jesus. We are watching Jesus' story unfold and by proxy, by parable really, we have choices to make: Will we follow him? Will we put this ragamuffin character over and above the voices with social standing that question Him? Will Jesus be our cornerstone; will the living Christ hold us together?

The parable goes like this. There was a householder 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. When it was harvest time, he sent his servants to collect the produce. The tenants beat one servant and killed the other. The landowner sent more servants and the tenants did the same. The landowner thought to himself "certainly they will respect my son," so he sent his son, but the tenants said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Then Jesus turns to the chief priests and elders and asks, "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" And with the words they say, they indict themselves: "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."

Jesus reminds them, "Don't you know your scriptures? Remember Psalm 118 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?' 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."

The religious leaders were producing fruits, but not fruits of the kingdom. The fruits they produced were for show, for status, for power over others. The fruits were beautiful on the outside, but ridden with unhealthy intentions on the inside.

But not so for the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God appearances don't matter so much. In the Kingdom of God being "respectable" doesn't matter so much. In the Kingdom of God being the best, even winning or being right, doesn't matter so much. For the fruit of the Kingdom of God is not about appearances. It's about the heart, which in Jesus' time was known as the seat of the will. The fruit of the Kingdom of God is about doing the right thing because such action is the right thing to do. The fruit of the Kingdom of God is about having what really matters-loving God and loving our

neighbor-in the center of our lives. And if we as Christians want to know what that looks like, we look to Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

“But I can’t do that” you say, “I’m not Jesus.” This is true. I am not Jesus either. The Savior has come and will come again. At the same time, Jesus was fully human. His life was no mere theory. He lived and died as one of us. Of course, one might point out that Jesus was fully God, too, and we are not God. True. At the same time, we are made in God’s image. To be made in God’s image means “we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God” (BCP p.845).

In other words, by virtue of being human, we have the capacity to bear fruit of the Kingdom of God. And we know how to make this process happen. We know our duty to God: “to love and obey God; to put nothing in the place of God; to set aside regular time for worship and study; to love our parents; to show respect for the life God has given us.” We know our duty to God: “to bear no prejudice or hatred; to be kind to all creatures of God; to be honest and fair in our dealings with others; to seek the necessities of life for all people; to use our gifts as ones who must answer for them to God.” We know our duty to God: “to speak the truth and not to mislead others by our silence; to resist envy and greed; to rejoice in each other’s gifts” (BCP pp.847-848).

We know what doing right by God and for God’s creation looks like. We see this fruit in this world. When a lawyer takes a case for one falsely accused person without hope for acclaim. Such is the fruit of the Kingdom of God. When on a Saturday night a mother and father help the children decide what they are going to wear Sunday morning. Such is a fruit of the Kingdom of God. When an adult, or even a teenager, pledges to the parish budget so the lights are on for this worship space, for TAP Head Start preschoolers to learn, for Community Youth Program students to receive individualized attention, for parishioners to listen to those in need on Tuesday morning. Such is the fruit of the Kingdom of God.

Although bearing such fruit is always possible, it’s not always probable fruit. There’s a little bit of the chief priests in all of us; there’s a little bit of the destructive tenant within our souls. We get so caught up in our own righteousness that we do not have right relationships with others. We hurt or even kill that which we can’t stand. We lash out at who or what we don’t understand.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, hope is not lost. Hope is never lost. The one, holy undivided Trinity continually offers grace upon grace. There is nothing that will change what God has already done in Christ. Each day, each moment, we have new chances to try again and love more. So, how about worrying less about what others think? How about trying to fit less into a single day, a single home, a single heart? How about worrying less about winning? How about wondering more: What would Jesus have me do? With my time? With my money? With my skills and joys? You see, such questions lead us to kingdom living-right here, right now. That’s where the real fruit is. Such is the Lord’s doing and it is indeed marvelous in our eyes. *Amen.*