

Sermon Transcript

Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46 | October 8, 2023 | Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to my friends in Christ,

Most parables that Jesus shares are subtle. They can be confusing or hold many paths towards interpretation.

Today, Jesus is anything but subtle.

This is the parable that puts the last nail in the cross, so to speak.

When Jesus compares the religious leaders to wicked tenants in a vineyard, there's only one way to understand and interpret his words: YOU guys are wicked.

And they know it.

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

They want to arrest him right there, but they also know that there will be pushback from the crowds if they try it. They don't want riots. They just want things to go back to the way they were.

He compares the religious leaders to the tenants of a vineyard who beat and stone those who come to collect the produce at the end of the season. Then, when the son of the landowner comes, they resolve to kill him. Why? So they can get his inheritance.

Really? Why on EARTH would you get the inheritance of someone you've killed? This is so illogical.

This reference to killing the son is an obvious hint at what is to come for Jesus. He's poking the bear at the expense of his own life. Why does Jesus say this blunt parable?

Luther Seminary professor, Matthew Skinner remarked that his biggest surprise is that the tenants didn't consider that their actions would have consequences.

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Jesus illustrates this and the religious leaders first thought is not to correct the behavior. It's to cover it up.

Our actions do have consequences.

This was a theme that came up consistently during a parenting class that I led a few weeks ago.

I had the pleasure of joining with soldiers and significant others to talk about how to raise children that grow up to be mature humans who can make their own choices and have critical thinking skills.

It's **a curriculum called parenting with love and logic (show the book)** and the coursebook empowered parents to teach responsibility, use enforceable statements, and my favorite: avoid power struggles by teaching effective versus ineffective choices.

Perhaps if the religious leaders were more open-minded about creating a culture of effective choices, they wouldn't have been so threatened by Jesus calling their power and authority into question!

Here's the secret: Teaching choices in a parenting class isn't limited to kids. We can treat co-workers, family members, and other grown-ups the same way! It's about how we frame our choices around control.

The writers of the curriculum had this to say about control: We can share it or risk that our kids will harm themselves.

(SLIDE of quote) Control is a life or death matter. We can share it... or risk that our kids will hurt themselves trying to wrench it out of our hands.

Do you remember what set off the religious leaders last week? What did they question?

The *authority* with which Jesus was teaching in the temple.

They don't want to share it and they're afraid of what happens if they don't relinquish some of it—so Jesus keeps teaching.

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They act like they're in control, but they don't have it.

In the parenting class, we talked about offering choices when conflict arises.

The advice was to make the choices something you can be ok with the outcome. For example,

- Are you going to wear your coat or carry it?
- Are you planning to be home at 10:30 or 11?
- Do you want carrots OR peas... or, get crazy and add OR broccoli with dinner tonight?

It's implied that they have to pick one. They get to choose which one. What choices we provide is important—because we have to be ok with both outcomes. One mom said her husband would make choices that were unenforceable like “clean your room or we're not going on vacation!” Her point was, you're going to punish EVERYONE? Really?

Or unrealistic like “finish your homework or you're never watching television again” Ever? Maybe a better choice would be “would you like to clean up your room before or after you finish your homework?” Then, “we will play outside or you can watch tv when those responsibilities are done.”

The “logic” is that as we model basic choices at a young age, kids will start to think carefully about bigger choices later. The choices, as you can see, also go for the positives.

The most important ingredient to parenting that the course talked about was empathy. Take the anger or emotion out of our own choices and provide a non-anxious environment.

Do you notice how unrealistic our expectations of others become when we feel our own temperature rising?

I'm sure that's how the religious leaders felt that day. They were getting so angry that they couldn't reasonably make choices that would allow them to hear the truth that Jesus was offering them.

They couldn't hear about the grace and mercy offered by their loving father who is sharing the kingdom of heaven with everyone—not just the few. What do I make of these choices for MY heart today?

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The choice isn't about guilt, shame, and fear. The choices Jesus presents get us to think about what kind of human will I be?

What kind of parent or friend or neighbor will I be today?

Karoline Lewis goes a step further of placing ourselves directly in the parable:

“what kind of tenant will you be to care for God’s kingdom?” (SLIDE)

Lewis said, “How are we doing taking care of that vineyard these days? Before we start casting shame and blame on the easy targets in this story and on those around us in our lives, we should take a long hard look at ourselves. Just how are we doing in our tending of the Kingdom of Heaven?

This is our charge — to care for God’s vineyard, to care for God’s people. We are leasing the land. I wonder how often we forget whose care we are representing and administering. We are on lease from God to care for God’s people, to care for God’s creation, to care for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus isn't subtle with the chief priests. And he isn't subtle with us.

What we do matters. What we say matters. How we treat each other is a reflection of God's love.

The kids sang it: We love because God first loved us.

Show God's love to your kids, to your friends, to your neighbors. Through the choices Jesus made for you and me, he first loved us. Choose Jesus. Choose love. Amen.