

18th Sunday after Pentecost,
Matthew 21,33-46.
Hymns: 352, 329, 188, 415, 292, 248.

Introit: Psalm 80:7-19.

P O God of hosts, restore us,
C **and cause Your face to shine, that we may be saved!**
P You uprooted a vine from Egypt.
C **You drove the nations out and planted it.**
P You cleared the ground for it.
C **It put down its roots and filled the land.**
P The mountains were covered with its shade,
C **and the mighty cedars with its branches.**
P It sent out its branches to the Sea,
C **and its shoots to the River.**
P Why have You broken down its walls,
C **so that all who pass along the way have been plucking its fruit?**
P The wild boar from the forest is ravaging it,
C **and the small creatures of the field are feeding in it.**
P O God of hosts, please return!
C **Look down from heaven and see! Take care of this vine,**
P of the root-stock that Your right hand has planted,
C **and of the cutting that You have let grow strong for Yourself!**
P The vine has been burnt with fire and cut down.
C **They are perishing at the rebuke of Your countenance.**
P Let Your hand be on the man at Your right hand,
C **the son of man whom You have let grow strong for Yourself!**
P Then we shall not be disloyal to You.
C **Give us life again! Then we shall call on Your name.**
P O LORD, God of hosts, restore us!
All: **Make Your face shine, that we may be saved!**

Collect: Gracious God, You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men who killed Him. Forgive us when we reject Your unfailing love, and grant us the fullness of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 5:1-7
Epistle: Philippians 3:4b-14.
Gospel: Matthew 21:33-46.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

The text for our sermon for this morning is written in the book of Matthew 21:33-43, which was a part of our gospel reading before

33 “Listen to another parable! There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard out to some farmers, and went away on a journey. **34** When the vintage time approached, he sent his servants to the tenant-farmers to get his fruit. **35** The tenant-farmers seized his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. **36** Then he sent other servants, more than the first, and the tenant-farmers treated them in the same way. **37** Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ **38** However, when the

tenant-farmers saw his son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and let us get his inheritance!' ³⁹ So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenant-farmers?"

41 They answered, "He will make those scoundrels die a miserable death and rent out the vineyard to other tenant-farmers, who will give him the fruit due to him at its right time."

42 Jesus asked them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The Stone that the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous for us to see'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation that continues to produce its fruit.

44 Anyone who falls on this Stone will be dashed in pieces, and, if It falls on anyone, It will crush him."

45 When the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they knew that He was talking about them.

46 Although they wanted to arrest Him, they were afraid of the crowds, because they regarded Him as a prophet.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

In looking at over this morning's Gospel lesson, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Jesus is not happy with the chief priests and Pharisees in His midst. If the parable of the wicked and murderous vineyard tenants wasn't enough to clue you in on this, then the additional commentary that Jesus provides after the parable will surely do the trick. It certainly worked for the Pharisees and chief priests. By the time Jesus finished talking, they knew without a doubt that He was referring to them. **"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation that continues to produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who falls on this Stone will be dashed in pieces, and, if It falls on anyone, It will crush him."**

That kind of reminds me of the day I fell down a lift shaft under construction on a building I was working on in Brisbane. Anyway to cut a long story short, the fall wasn't the problem, it was the sudden stop at the end. Trust me when I say whether the stone is falling on you, or you are falling on to the stone, things aren't going to be nice. But the example in our Gospel is worse. One way or another, you'll not only be broken, but you'll be pulverized. This must have been what St. Paul was talking about when he said that **Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles.** [1 Corinthians 1:23.]

Well...not really! If this is our interpretation here, we are wrong. St. Paul did say that Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews, which would certainly include that foul group of chief priests and Pharisees that we hear about in today's lesson, but that's not the word used here in the Gospel lesson for this morning. These are the theological dots that people often wrongly connect. The word for stumbling block, as it's used in 1 Corinthians, is skandalizo - scandal. That makes sense, doesn't it? Salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ crucified - alone - would be scandalous and blasphemous to a group of people who wrongly believed that the Messiah would be a great political and military leader who would make life here on earth a veritable paradise for them. To hear that your victory is not of this world and it comes through faith in this "defeated criminal nobody" - is scandalous.

However, that's not the word Jesus uses in today's lesson. In today's lesson, He specifically uses the word *pipto*, which means "to fall upon," and He uses it in both scenarios - the person falling upon the rock and being broken as well as the rock falling upon the person and crushing them. Believe it or not, this breaking

action includes everyone - faithful Christians too. Everyone, in one way or another, will encounter the solid rock of Christ and be either broken or crushed.

Now this is important to understand. All too often we hear these words about being broken and crushed and recognize them only in terms of future punishment. These words of Christ wind up coming across as nothing more than an ominous and terrifying threat. Let's face it: Not everyone believes in Christ - His Word, His Way, and His Will. Some people flat out reject Him. Some people refuse to let God's Word break them down. They refuse to let God's Word conform them to His Will, preferring instead to arrogantly and proudly re-form and fit God to meet their wants, their desires, and their opinions on how things should be. Judgment Day is not going to be nice for those ignorant cracked and empty pots, they, will encounter the truth of Christ, the Rock of our salvation, and be crushed to a pulp.

Remember, though, that there are two different understandings when it comes to being broken and/or crushed by Christ. Like I mentioned a few moments ago, all too often we hear these words and interpret the entire statement only in terms of divine wrath and hellish punishment. Don't get me wrong, this is a correct understanding. The Greek word that Jesus uses for "crushed" (likmao) is the same exact word that He uses elsewhere to speak of the winnowed sinful chaff that is separated from the good wheat. The sinful chaff—the crushed dusty remnant separated from the good wheat on the threshing floor - is winnowed right into the eternal and unquenchable fire of hell. [Matthew 3:12.]

However...there's a second, very good and necessary meaning here in these words too, particularly in the word which means "to be broken into pieces" (sun thal asso ma i). This word is different. To be broken into pieces is not the same as being crushed. You see, it's precisely God's Will that everyone does fall upon Him and be broken into a million pieces. There is a difference - a huge difference. God wants to completely break you and me down in our sinful ways. Sin has no place with righteous perfection. It's only after we are completely broken by God and His Word that He and He alone can put us back together the way He wants—righteous and holy, without blemish.

Make no mistake: As I said earlier, not everyone who encounters Christ on this side of eternity is broken down. Some reject. Some rebel and take a defiant stand against Him. They will be the ones crushed in their unbelief. This is why the vineyard was taken away from the sinfully proud and murderous Jews. They were not producing the fruits God desired.

So what are those fruits? - John the Baptist tells us in Matthew 3 that we are to bear fruits that are in keeping with repentance. My friends: The fruits our Lord looks for to be produced when He sows His seed of the Word are the fruits of repentance. The murderous tenants heard God's Word, but in stead of repenting they rebelled. They encountered Christ and refused to be broken.

Faithful repentance is different. When God's Word of Law and Gospel floods our ears and scores open the hard, sinful soil of our hearts, He, through His Holy Spirit, is planting in us the very Word of Christ; the Word made flesh for us. Repentance doesn't rebel against the message, or attempt to justify itself by making excuses saying. *"You just don't understand God."* The good and desirable fruits of repentant faith look to God alone and confess: ***"I am a poor, miserable sinner. I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. For the sake of Jesus Christ, forgive me."***

Properly understood in this light, we can clearly see why Jesus was unhappy with the chief priests and the Pharisees. It had nothing to do with their positions of authority. It had nothing to do with their wealth, knowledge, social status, or blood line. Rather, it had EVERYTHING to do with their hard, selfish, unrepentant hearts that looked to earn God's rich inheritance of heaven and eternal salvation by themselves; apart from the all-atoning cross of Jesus Christ. You see they were producing "good fruit" in everybody else's eyes, except God's! In fact, these blokes were the cream of the crop, as far as society was concerned.

However, all the fruits they produced were recognized by God as nothing more than wild grapes and dirty diapers when they were presented as something done in order to be saved, rather than as a humble, thanksgiving response because they were saved in Christ alone.

And that leaves us with one final point before we close: Rebellious impenitence hears God and tends to only hear either ominous and terrifying threats or vindictive challenges to our autonomy - our control over our own lives. That's what the word "autonomous" means - "to be a law unto one's self". It should come as no surprise that unfruitful faith responds the way it does to God's Word, either by trying to appease God by following all His rules and offering Him our good deeds in order to be saved, or by taking a defiant stand, and claim all the power and control and authority to themselves - "Who do they think they are? Who are they to tell God?"

Repentant faith is different. Repentant faith does hear the threat of the Law and is rightly terrified, but repentant faith also recognizes that God is speaking these things to us, not to crush us, but to save us. He speaks these things to us out of pure and genuine Fatherly love; a love that desires the crushing death of no man; a love so deep and so incomprehensible that it willingly and obediently went to the cross to suffer the justly-deserved wrath and punishment of God for us in our place, paying for each and every one of our sins with His own body and blood. Repentant faith turns to God, and God alone, and sees Christ - our forgiveness - waiting with open arms to embrace us and hold us fast in His undying and unconditional love. Repentant faith clings to Christ alone.

Friends: I can't make you see and hear these wonderful things. I can't make you believe. I can't make you bear the good and abundant fruits of faithful repentance in your life. I can only point you to the all-redeeming, blood-soaked cross of Christ. Here is the wage of our sin—paid in full. Here is the fruit of God's unconditional and eternal love for you, and me.

May His Law and Gospel take root in you and bear abundant fruits of repentant and thankful faith in all that you say, think, and do—now and into all eternity. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

3rd Hymn: 188

Prayer of the Church 17th Sunday after Pentecost

P Confident that our Lord hears the prayers of His faithful, let us approach His throne of mercy interceding on behalf of the church and the world

Brief silence,

P For faithfulness to Christ, our great High Priest, that in all things we may bear witness to Him and His loving kindness....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For faithful Christians, here and scattered throughout the world, that God would embolden them to make the good confession, even in the midst of persecution....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For our pastors, Sunday school teachers, and other servants of our congregations, that God would give them humble hearts to serve His people....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For those in authority over us, especially our prime minister, federal, state, and local governments. Those in the police, doctors, nurses, fire and ambulance and state emergency services, and our military personal serving to aid all Your people. Instil upon them the conviction that they are Your servants to guide, protect, defend, and to promote peace and good order in our land. Lead them to act honestly and justly for the welfare of all. Lord, in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For the youngest members of God's kingdom, that the Lord bless them and keep them safe, and the Lord would give each parent patience and wisdom to nurture their children, that He would bless those who teach and those who learn in our Sunday School, and that even when they face temptations and challenges, He would keep our children faithful to Him all their lives, Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray that God would deliver, the dying from their fear, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow and the sick from their infirmity [*especially*].
May all who cry to You in their need receive grace according to Your merciful will. Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P For those who commune this day at the Lord's altar, that they may find peace and life as they eat the Lord's life-giving body and drink His death-defying blood....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P For the saints who have gone before us, let us give thanks and praise to God. That we may look forward with sure confidence to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting....Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Grant our petitions, O Lord, for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.