

#64
March 10, 2019
Mark 12:1-12
Good News: God's crazy love

12 Then Jesus began teaching them with stories: “A man planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. ²At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. ³But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. ⁴The owner then sent another servant, but they insulted him and beat him over the head. ⁵The next servant he sent was killed. Others he sent were either beaten or killed, ⁶until there was only one left—his son whom he loved dearly. The owner finally sent him, thinking, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’

⁷“But the tenant farmers said to one another, ‘Here comes the heir to this estate. Let’s kill him and get the estate for ourselves!’ ⁸So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard.

⁹“What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?” Jesus asked. “I’ll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures?

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.

¹¹This is the Lord’s doing,
and it is wonderful to see.”

¹²The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.

Have you ever been in a situation where you asked the question: “Who’s in charge here?” Have you been mistreated or felt nobody is even listening to you? Fortunately, this has not been my experience here in Fairland, but it has happened to me before.

We got stuck in the airport in Texas. I had a baby in my arms and they told me that we would have to spend the night in the waiting area because they canceled our flight. I was not prepared by any means for that. I had to tell them many times and with a slightly raised voice that I had a baby. Eventually the manager came. After I explained our situation in a rather agitated fashion he provided a hotel room for the night.

A good leader or boss can help a lot and resolve many arguments and problems keeping almost everyone happy.

The question I have for us today is: **“Who is in charge?”** To whom do you listen? Who is your Leader? What is the voice that is most authoritative? Can you tell that your King and your Boss is Jesus? Can you say: “I serve and listen to God”?

Mark devotes 6 out of 16 chapters to the events of what we call Holy Week. That is over 35% of the book. Chapter 11 starts with Palm Sunday. After the procession and celebration of Jesus being king, he walked into the temple, looked around and went back to Bethany.

The next morning Jesus cursed the fig tree and overturned the tables in the temple.

On Tuesday of that week he returned to the temple. He went to church 3 days in a row. This time the leaders were ready. “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you authority?”

Jesus replied with a question about John the Baptist. They could not answer because they were afraid of the multitudes.



Jesus then told this last parable recorded by Mark about the Father, who planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. The owner, the Creator, invests and does all the work knowing there will be fruit. All is done. All is prepared. He leases it to the sharecroppers to stay and take care of his good work.

Have you rented a place to somebody? Have you rented a place from somebody? I have rented quite a few places in my life. The craziest one was when I lived in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius. The owner would come once per month to collect the rent and he would check every single corner and everything was very closely investigated in this little apartment. He was a little bit paranoid. He would see damage everywhere. He would see a new scratch, a little stain, or door knobs that were overused and would raise the rent every single time he came. It was the worst thing living under that kind of owner.

The owner of the vineyard is very different. At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. Normally it would be on the third year. So after three years, the servant comes. But what do the tenants do? They beat him and send back empty. Why would they do that? Had they become greedy? Did they not realize they were not the owners? Had they lost respect the owner and think there

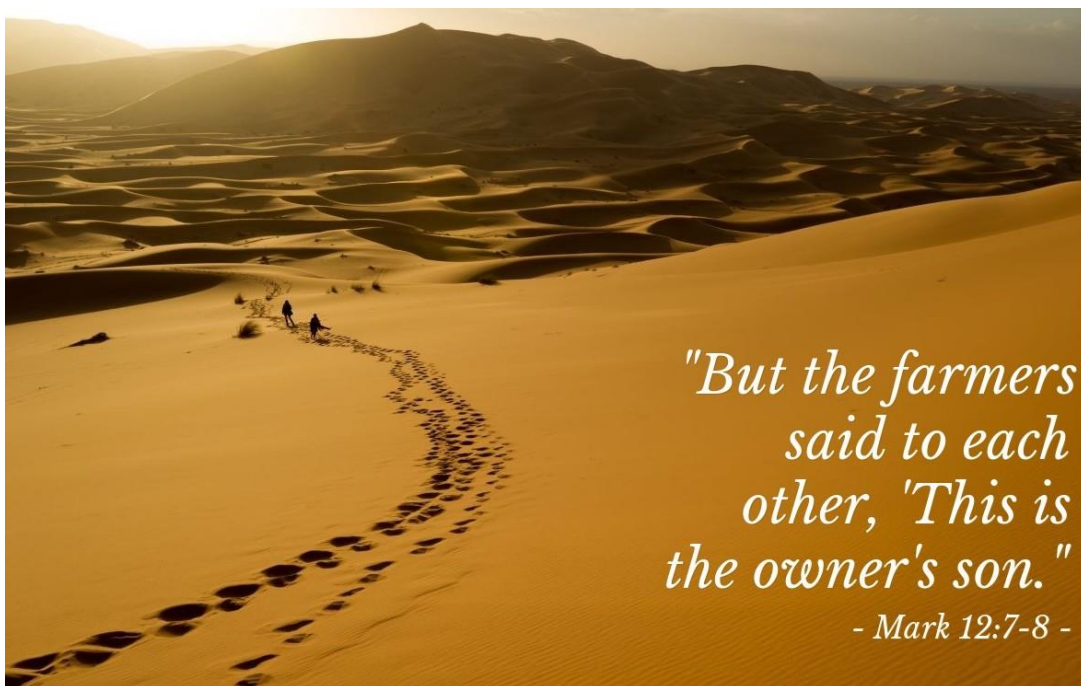
would be no consequences? The father sent another servant. This time they insulted and beat Father's servant. It is getting worse. I always say: If you are not making right choices you are making wrong choices. The more we live with wrong choices, the worse the choices get. There is no neutral, stagnant stage. It is up or it is down. Are you getting healed by God or injured by evil?

The father sent a third servant. This time they killed him.

Imagine being that Owner. How crazy that would be to keep sending your servants. I would never send another servant. I would not give these wicked tenants another chance. But the Creator keeps sending and sending his servants.

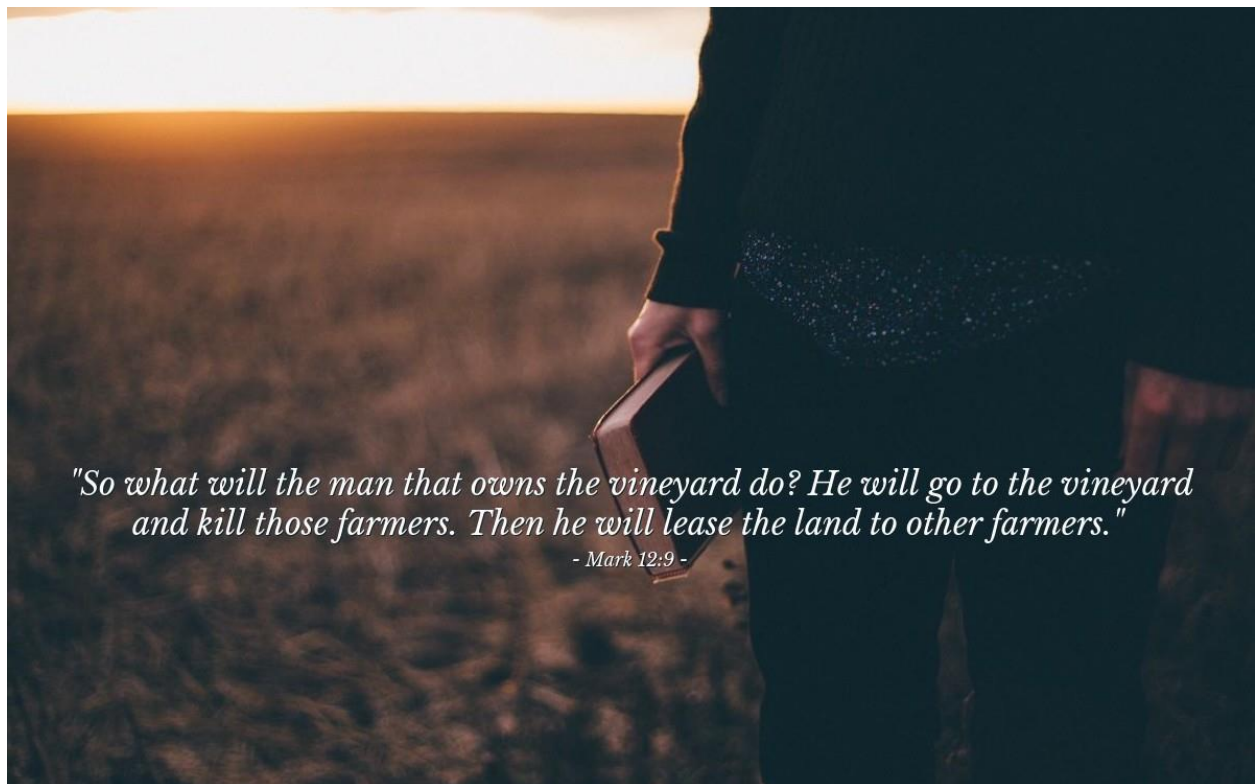
Like this would not be enough, finally He sent his only Son. What is He thinking?

I always want to hear a good ending of the story. I highly dislike the movies with a bad ending. This time I am hopeful for the Father. "The owner finally sent his beloved son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.' This is the last resource, the last hope, the biggest gift. There is nothing left after that. The most gracious, most generous, most patient Father gives all He has.



⁷ "But the tenant farmers said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' ⁸ So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard.

One action leads to another. You compromise, justify, have good excuses and every time you go deeper and further from God. The tenants murder the Father's son thinking If we kill him all will belong to us. The only way you can reason this way is if you think the Father will never return. They only way you can kill the Son is imagining that the Father is also dead. But the Father is not dead and the Father is coming back. The Father sees, hears and is just. He is coming back.



"So what will the man that owns the vineyard do? He will go to the vineyard and kill those farmers. Then he will lease the land to other farmers."

- Mark 12:9 -

The people who heard the story had no questions They all understood too clearly what Jesus is saying. Jesus was talking about Israel. The servants represent the many prophets that God sent to the people of Israel: Jeremiah was stoned, Isaiah was killed, the prophet Micah and John the Baptist were killed and many others.

Yes, the Owner, the Father is God and His Son is Jesus. Obviously this story was about them. They were ready to arrest him.

Sadly, instead of changing their lives and turning to repentance, accepting the authority of Jesus who was right in front of them, they chose to stick to their old lives, to their old system and refused to acknowledge the truth.

Does this story apply only to the Jews in that time and culture?

Once there were a farmer. Who owned all the land. He planted all the corn and soy beans. He leased this land to the tenants and expect them to give his share from the crops. He loved so much these people in Indiana that send them rain and sun, made the land to produce the corps.

How do you see yourself in this story? Do we recognize that we are tenants? Do we claim to be the boss and insist that all is mine? Can we realize that even my life belongs to God? The earth and all is in it belongs to God. Our time belongs to God.

This is the first Sunday of Lent. It is a season of renewing our efforts to examine our souls.

I very highly encourage you to join and walk this journey to Easter with a group of believers. You have 4 groups to choose from. Choose the theme, the leader or just pick one. If you do not feel comfortable driving at night, we will arrange to pick you up and drive you home. It will be in different churches so you can have an even richer experience of Lent. What kind of Easter would there if there was no suffering on the cross? No death? There would be no Easter. So why do we think we can just celebrate Easter without being willing to take the journey to the cross and death. By God's grace we have another year to prepare our hearts, minds and souls to experience the joy of new life in Christ.

During Lent I encourage you to practice a discipline of giving an entire Sunday each week to the Lord. Would you give God one day of totally undivided attention? How you will keep this day Holy? God loves community and loves to be where two or three gather in His name. Let's start tonight gathering at Fairland UMC tonight at 5:30PM. The best invested time is time with God and with others.

We learn several truths about God in this parable.

God is the owner. We don't own anything. Psalm 24 tells us the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

Watch little children in nursery. One the first words they learn is "Mine!" If two want to play with the same toy. They will use the word, "Mine" even though we all know neither one owns the toy. We do the same with all that God provides us to use.

The essence of sin is declaring independence from your Creator—refusing to acknowledge God’s ownership of this world and rejecting His claim on your life.

God is the owner. We are the managers. The original job description God gave to Adam and Eve was to be good managers of His Creation. The Bible says, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15)

We find in the parable other truths about God. God is patient. God is loving. God the is final judge of all things.

Let us consider one more angle in looking at this parable. Could the vineyard be the kingdom of God?

God left the vineyard in the care of Israel. God sent messengers to collect God’s share of the produce. They were mistreated and killed. The caretakers of God’s kingdom even assassinated God’s Son telling themselves that the inheritance would now belong to them. The owner comes and destroys the tenants and gives the kingdom to others.

The others are you and me. We have entered the kingdom through by the grace of Jesus Christ. We are now the managers of God’s kingdom which Jesus said is within you.

Romans 14:17 tells us that the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We are tenants in God’s kingdom and expected to produce righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

As we prepare our hearts for communion ask yourself: Who is in charge? Who is the owner? Am I being faithful with what God has entrusted in my care?