

Introductory

The text has parallels in Matthew (21:33-46) and Mark (12:1-12). The accounts are all very similar and complimentary; each adds bits of information left out by the other two. None of them are appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, most of the Matthew text (33-43) is appointed to be read on Pentecost 20A, while the Mark and Luke accounts are not appointed at all.

In LSB, Matthew's reading is appointed for Proper22A, and Mark's account is not read at all, so the sermon you want to dig out as a good starting point is the last one from Proper22A. It is noteworthy that Luke exclusively quotes from Isaiah (8: 14,15), the text about the stone of stumbling, and if you didn't know what this parable is about before, then you do know it now.

To help your hearers better understand what is going on here, and what is the point of the parable, talk about some common current farming practices, which have a number of important similarities to farming practices in that day. In order to do that, you will have to familiarize yourself with farming practices in those days, which is harder, and farming practices these days, which is easier.

That's easy for most Pastors; just ask some of the farmer sheep. The whole business of landowners renting land to tenant farmers is very common in the Midwest, and even non-farmers know the concept, which is not hard to explain. These days, rent is mostly paid in cash. Those days, it was almost always paid in kind. If you don't want to talk to actual farmers, WIK can help you out.

How do you talk to actual farmers? The Clinton Circuit IDE does a pulpit exchange Wednesdays in Lent, and I am participating this year, and I found myself two weeks ago at a post-service snack time talking to Pig Farmer Chris, and I learned a lot about pigs. Last week, we had the Prodigal, who ended up lusting after those marinating pods. I quoted from "Pig Expert Chris" in the sermon.

We have lamented the tendency of exegetes and preachers to turn parables that are primarily Gospel into parables that are entirely Law. Last Sunday was about the Gracious Father, a Gospel parable about God, who happened to have two sons, one of which was a prodigal. The focus over the years has turned to the Prodigal, don't be like the prodigal, the Law. The Reformed do that a lot.

But here we have a parable that is almost all Law. The tenants of the land are wicked, and in the end, they will get their just desserts, the unbending wrath of the owner of the land. The good news

can be found in verse sixteen, where the landowner gives the vineyard to others; us, and in verse seventeen, where it says that the rejected stone becomes the head of the corner; Jesus.

This parable, directed at first century Judaism, has relevance for twenty-first century Christians, who are rushing headlong down that same way, being led down the path to ruin by pied pipers of university teachers, “Bible Scholars,” seminary professors, and parish pastors who learn from them to reject the Bible. People like George Weigel and Niall Ferguson and me are fighting back.

Over the years, Christians have often wondered – sometimes they ask me – how so many Jews could reject their Messiah, which is the subject of this parable. We can perhaps gain insight into that way of thinking by looking at the large number of Christians who do the same. I may have mentioned these two books on other occasions, so excuse me if I sound like a broken record.

In *The Cube and the Cathedral*, named after a public work of art and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Weigel notes that what used to be Christian Europe is no more, and he wonders why is that? In *Civilization, the West and the Rest*, Ferguson points out that the Christian religion is not only one important part of our Western Culture, but it is in fact at the very heart of our very essence.

I came across an article in The Guardian questioning whether there actually is in reality such a civilization. It was written by a Muslim from Africa, and he had a lot to say, but I quickly become bored when the writer uses a lot of words but doesn’t make a lot of sense. But the west have been abandoning our culture – including our religion – for a long time and is increasingly hostile to it.

Textual Notes

9. The occasion and target audience of the parable is given thusly, “Ἦρξατο δὲ πρὸς τὸν λαὸν λέγειν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην – He began to speak this parable to the people.” That noun with the definite article, “τὸν λαὸν – the people,” is in the NT often used to refer to Israel, the People of God. The parable is told to them, and it is told about them, they are in Jerusalem, and they don’t like it.

As is often the case when Jesus tells a parable, He here talks about “ἄνθρωπος – a man” unnamed. Some manuscripts add “τις – a certain man.” It is also often the case that the man could be any man, and the gist of it is something like, “so there was this guyu...” The guy is further identified as a man who “ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα – planted a vineyard,” which was a common thing to do.

The man owns the land, and he plants his vineyard, and then he rents it out to some tenants, and then he goes away for a period of time – which duration is not stated specifically but called “χρόνους ἱκανούς – a long time.” The people who will be tending the vines while the owner is away are in a landlord/tenant relationship with him. Their vocation is “γεωργοὶς – vinedressers.”

These men are not unskilled labor, but they are in fact very good at what they do, much like the Midwestern farmer who rents and farms another person's land. I know farmers who rent, but they all want to own, and these men no doubt wanted to work up to owning their own land, and later on we will find to what lengths they will go to get this land, maybe without having to pay for it.

10. While the owner of the land is still away, accounting time comes, and “καὶ καιρῷ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς τοὺς γεωργοὺς δοῦλον – in season he sent a servant to the tenants.” The noun “καιρῷ – in season” means that in the cycle of farming grapes, it's the time of year when the owner routinely does what he does. These days, grapes are grown year-round on the Mediterranean side of Israel.

In the time of Jesus, grapes were an early summer crop, and it was harvest time, time to collect the rent, and the purpose clause tells us why the servant was sent, “ἵνα ἀπὸ τοῦ καρποῦ τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος δώσουσιν αὐτῷ – so that the from the fruit of the vineyard give to him,” what was his due. The response of the tenants should have been, as a matter of course, to give the owner that due.

But instead, “οἱ δὲ γεωργοὶ ἐξἀπέστειλαν αὐτὸν δείραντες κενόν – the farmers sent him away – having beaten him – empty handed. The verb used to describe what the tenants did to the servant is “δέρω,” a word that means more than a schoolyard scuffle with a bloody nose, maybe a black eye and bruises. They beat him with the serious whip, the kind used on Jesus on Good Friday.

They beat the crap out of the messenger, who was just doing his job, and if they had given him something, we could make the case that the farmers are negotiating. They beat him and gave him nothing, revealing that this is simply a shameless land grab; they want something that does not belong to them, and they think to take it by use of physical force, and they will withhold the rent.

This vineyard was, in all likelihood, located out in the country, not physically close to anything like legal authority. If the owner wanted to take back his property from these rebellious tenants, he would have to do what this owner does. Maybe he won't do that. He's off in a distant land, he's wealthy, and now they don't pay the rent, they have more money; more means to fight him.

At first glance, it sounds like these tenants haven't thought this thing through. What do they think is going to happen when you refuse the rent? How does beating the messenger do you any good? But as the story plays out, the plan that looks at first to be critically flawed is actually one of a few that can possibly work to get them what they want. They want to take this property for themselves.

11. The owner sent another servant, but they also whipped him with the same whip, and in addition to that, they also “ἀτιμάσαντες – shamed him,” before sending him away empty handed as well. The word is “ἀτιμάζω,” and it seems to be a generic term for something shameful or humiliating. The verb form is an active aorist participle; they did things to him, with focus on the acts.

Focus not on the person and for them it was just business, nothing personal. The verb form also tells us that it was not just one thing, but many or repeated things, and that first they did what they

did to him, and then sent him away. The word often has sexual connotation, like in Romans 12:4, where it talks about homosexual men “dishonoring” their bodies, and of women of low character.

If you wanted to shame a man in that time and place, that act would be among the most extreme ways to do that, and this may well be a euphemism – softer words – for that. At any rate, I don’t think we can say with any degree of certainty that that’s what happened, and it’s probably best to keep that out of the pulpit. Maybe talk about it in a smaller group of adults, like Bible Class.

12. The man sends yet a third messenger, and just when it doesn’t seem like it could get any worse, they crank it up a notch. The tenants “τραυματίσαντες ἐξέβαλον – wounded and threw out” the man. The first verb is the etymological ancestor of “traumatize,” and it occurs twice in the NT; here and in Acts 19:16, where the man possessed by an evil spirit violently attacked several men.

The noun cognate, the parent of “trauma,” occurs once in the NT, to describe the “wounds” of the man beaten and rescued by the Good Samaritan, Jesus. It’s one thing to be beaten and whipped, and another thing to be shamed, and then there’s being “wounded,” most likely with a weapon. Because of the lack of a Deputy or other law enforcement, they were all armed most of the time.

Depending on where it was located and how deep it went, a wound was serious business in and of itself. Depending on those two things and things like the presence of bacteria on the weapon and the ready availability of wine, a wound was often fatal. Wounded Roman soldiers were routinely left behind by the others because for some kinds of wounds, there was simply nothing to be done.

Alvin Schmidt thinks the Romans left their wounded behind because they were not Christians, and there’s that as well. To be sure, the Christians took them with even if their wounds were certainly to be fatal, in order to comfort them and offer a proper burial, and through the time of the Great War many wounds became infected, gangrenous, and were often fatal. Not so much these days.

The reason the Samaritan pours wine into the wounds of the man is because it was the disinfectant of the day, and the alcohol found in wine is still pretty good at that task. The picture we see here is of a man brutally assaulted by a group of men, almost certainly armed with swords, who use their weapons to wound the man, then toss him out like yesterday’s garbage to fend for himself.

He also was just a guy doing his job. Clearly the tenants are treating these visitors like this because they want the owner to stop sending people to collect rent from them. It makes sense that they would be increasingly nasty to each succeeding servant, like we see happening. First beating, then beating and “shaming,” then the attack on the third man causing wounds that may be fatal.

13. The landowner is now called “ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος – the Master of the vineyard,” and we hear him asking himself, “Τί ποιήσω – what should I do?” He may be speaking to trusted advisors or may be taking his own counsel. He concludes by deciding “πέμψω τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν – I will send my Son, the beloved.” We note that he is designated “the” and “my” son.

The reasoning behind his well thought out plan of action is “ἴσως τοῦτον ἐντραπήσονται – of course they will respect him,” and one would not expect anything less. There is no indication that the father expected his son to be killed by the tenants. His expectation is in fact as stated by him to be just the opposite of that. If the tenants are bluffing, then he is going all in with his son.

The adverb “ἴσως – of course,” is a hapax in the NT, and the translations have everything from “surely” to “probably” to “perhaps” to “it may be” for the word. Those are all terms of uncertainty, and that’s not what’s going on here. The cognate adjective (isos) of the adverb (isos) is the root of English terms like “*isometric*” and “*isosceles*” – referring to *equivalencies*” (biblos.com).

To make the father’s act one of uncertainty is to present him as a man who is weak and impotent. The meaning here is that the reasonable expectation of the owner is that these tenants will give to the son of the owner the respect – the word means to turn away in shame – that is due as the son of their Lord. Think here of the feudal system, and even to its vestiges as we know them today.

14. When they see the sent man and realize that the owner has sent his son, the tenants get together and “διελογίζοντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους – reasoned among themselves;” they discussed and debated with each other and came to a conclusion using the simplest of all logical formulae; primary thesis – this is the heir, secondary thesis – if the heir is dead, then there’s no way he can inherit the property.

Conclusion – if we kill him, then the land becomes ours. The original plan seems to have been to wear the landowner down by increasingly severe treatment of messengers sent to them. That didn’t work, and they seem to be surprised to see the son coming to do this rather menial task. These days, it would be difficult to pull this off. Barclay thinks it happened all the time then and there.

The story itself is the kind of thing which could and did happen. Judaea in the time of Jesus was in the throes of economic trouble and labour unrest.

These days, around here, if the renter refused to pay the rent, the owner would sue for it, and the renter would be evicted, and the Deputy would make sure of it. But there was no Deputy in those days, and law enforcement as we know it is a relatively recent development, and I could see something like this happening then, and in places like New York City eviction is harder to do.

Readers of *National Review* and watchers of *The Simpsons* are ahead of the curve on this subject, which can also be said of most subjects. In the classic Bart Carney Episode (S9 E12), Homer and Bart befriend father and son carnival workers Cooder and Spud, who move into the Simpson house, and when the Simpsons leave and return, Cooder and Spud will not let them into their own house.

National Review says that this sort of thing happens all the time in places like Denmark and the other nauseatingly tolerant European countries, and that article is several years old by now. People refuse to pay rent, and they refuse to move out, and when push comes to shove, the law often has to get involved, and the interloper leaves only when the people with weapons show up.

15. When the son came to his inheritance, “ἐκβαλόντες αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος ἀπέκτειναν – they threw him out and killed him.” The preposition “ἔξω – out” followed by a noun in the genitive case indicates motion out of, which means that the son was actually present inside of the vineyard, there to confront the rebellious renters. We are not given any dialogue, but they did what they did.

That verb “ἐκβάλλω – to throw out,” is a common word (eighty-one occurrences in the NT), and it is often used to describe adversarial confrontations that are often accompanied by violence. Neither the messengers nor the son are said to have backup in the form of armed men, and none of them appear to have put up much of a fight. In all those cases, they should not have had to fight.

Having told that story, Jesus now asks the rhetorical question, “τί οὖν ποιήσει αὐτοῖς ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος – what therefore will the Lord of the vineyard do to them?” The question is not about morality; what the Lord should or should not do, but about what the Lord will as a matter of course do at this point. He could have told them what the man will – of course – do, but He asks them.

Part of that is that figures of speech like the rhetorical question force the hearer to think without even knowing that he is being made to do that. In this case, the little word “οὖν – therefore” has big meaning here; based on what I’ve just told you, what will the Lord of the vineyard do to those men. They pushed all their chips to the center of the table and now have gone bust. What next?

16. Sometimes the students will not know the answer, or they will be afraid to answer because they’re not sure that they’re right, or if the answer is obvious and everybody knows it, the teacher just goes ahead and answers His own question. He confirms what is obvious to all, of course “ἐλεύσεται καὶ ἀπολέσει τοὺς γεωργοὺς τούτους – He will come and destroy those farmers.”

We might see such an act as vigilante or even outside of the law, but in those days the killing would have been done by the party who had been wronged, and nobody would have batted an eye about it. That was the norm, but this was probably not, “καὶ δώσει τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἄλλοις – he will give the land away to others,” and this is where we, who work in God’s vineyard, come in.

Their response, “ἀκούσαντες δὲ εἶπαν Μὴ γένοιτο – hearing this, they said ‘Lord, no.’” The verb “γένοιτο – Lord, no” is the optative form of “γίνομαι – to become,” and their declaration is one of disbelief that such a thing would ever happen. The commentators seem to think they are referring to the killing of the son, saying such a thing would never happen. At least not by us it wouldn’t.

I think the thing making them incredulous is the giving away of the land to others. According to common law then, in the absence of an heir the tenant or tenants took over the land they occupied. They no doubt found themselves admiring the tenants for pulling it off, not understanding that not all deaths of all heirs are equal. It’s one thing for the heir to die without being murdered.

It’s another thing for you to make the heir die by murdering him, thinking – like they did – that they would gain for themselves his inheritance. This parable is told to them, about them, on their

home court, they understand it, and they don't like it. They understood that they were tenants who were going to kill the son, because they were, and if not them, to whom would the vineyard go?

17 - 18. These men share with Jesus a common knowledge of the OT, and He looks them in the eye and them a question that might be rhetorical, “Τί οὖν ἐστὶν τὸ γεγραμμένον τοῦτο – what is therefore this writing?” and then He quotes from Psalm 118: 22. To determine the NT meaning of an OT quotation, looking at the quote and it's context in the OT is a good starting point.

If you read through Psalm 118, that verse “the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner,” looks oddly out of place in this Psalm that is not at all about building. Down to the stacks, up with Keil and Delitzsch, who likewise find the presence of this verse of Psalm 118 “perplexing in connection with the direct reference to the people despised by the heathen.”

I'm almost embarrassed to say that the explanation in WIK is simple, concise, and correct. The unknown and anonymous author of the article entitled *Psalm 118*, deftly wielding Occam's Razor, says of the quoted verses that, “Opposition and difficulties are seen in this Psalm but in the midst of it God will display His salvation.” Here, and in many other places, Jesus agrees with WIK.

He has just told a parable where a lot of opposition and difficulties in the form of violent beatings, wounds inflicted, and even death is being perpetrated on good people just doing their jobs by wicked people. Indeed, the stone has been rejected, like the messengers and the son, and in fact that stone, that son, will become the cornerstone of the building of God, the Christian Church.

Looking ahead, the Son is about to be rejected by all, even by the Father, and He will die an innocent death – just doing His job – on the cross. Later on, the messengers He will send out, the Apostles, will likewise be rejected and even killed simply because they proclaim Jesus as the Christ but in the end, it will be the rejectors of that stone who are crushed by that selfsame stone.

19. In the eighth chapter of this book (v. 10, and Matthew and Mark have the same quote), Luke has Jesus saying that He speaks in parables because “to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” He's talking there about parables that proclaim the Gospel.

We see here, and in other places, that the wicked *do* understand parables that proclaim the Law, which they understand. Unbelievers, they are not part of the Kingdom of God, and when they hear parables about the Kingdom (the Gospel), they can't understand them. But when they hear a parable about judgment (the Law), they understand full well that Jesus is talking about them.

And they still don't like it at all. The Chief Priests, of the priestly class, and the Scribes (lawyers) are the two groups who are said to be “ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ – seeking to lay hands on Him in that hour.” The laying on of hands can mean different things in different contexts, and they clearly don't want to ordain Jesus, but they want to do extreme violence to Him.

Which is to say that they want to do to Jesus what the wicked tenants in the parable did to the son, thereby confirming beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything Jesus had just said about them is true. But they did not, and what kept them from it was “καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν λαόν – they feared the people,” because many believed in Jesus, and even if they didn’t, many others liked Him.

That explanation is followed by the further explanatory “ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπεν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην – because they knew that He speaks this parable at them,” meaning that the people also knew at whom this judgment of Jesus was directed, the masses would note, as we have noted, that what Jesus had just said about them was true, and they didn’t like those guys anyway.

A lot of RC (Roman Catholic) feel that way about The Priest. They know that the priesthood is a higher calling and that on some level he is a better Christian than they are simply by virtue of his being ordained, they understand that he’s teaching correct RC doctrine, they know that they can’t get to God with him, so they need him for their very salvation. But they just don’t like the guy.

20. They are not able at this time to accomplish their purpose and goal, but they would go back to the drawing board and formulate a plan. Luke tells us that they “ἀπέστειλαν ἐγκαθέτους – sent out spies.” The verb of sending is the origin of the word and title “Apostle,” so while Jesus is sending out men to preach the Gospel, Satan is sending out other people for other purposes.

The noun is a hapax in the NT, and it means “one who lies in wait,” and is usually – every single English translation I’m looking at – translated “spy.” If we’re talking about somebody lying in wait, as for prey, this is more like a stealthy hunter than a spy. A quick perusal at the Shakespeare Concordance reveals that in 1611 the word “spy” used as a verb (twenty-four times) meant “see.”

The noun “spy” occurs only once in Shakespeare, and it carries with it negative connotations. In *Tempest*, Prospero says to Ferdinand “and hast put thyself Upon this island as a spy, to win it From me.” *Venus and Adonis* speaks of “the bate-breeding spy,” Troilus and Cressida cleverly uses the noun and the verb in the same sentence, and it has Pandarus saying, “you spy, what do you spy?”

Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was the first European monarch to make great use of spies, and she had them all over the place, and to call the men sent out to keep an eye on Jesus “spy” would have put them in a negative light. That negative light has dimmed over the years, but the dim witted and lazy Bible translators (LSB) keep using the word that once was right, but now is wrong.

Of these “spies” we’re told “ὑποκρινομένους ἑαυτοὺς δικαίους εἶναι, ἵνα ἐπιλάβωνται αὐτοῦ λόγου – they pretended to be Christians so as to catch Him in his word.” They verb “to catch” is a double entendre; when they are able to grab onto something objectionable He has said, they will grab hold of Him and bring Him in. That plan never came to fruition, and they had to resort to Judas.

And of course the desired result was that they could grab Him, and “ὥστε παραδοῦναι αὐτὸν τῇ ἀρχῇ καὶ τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τοῦ ἡγεμόνος – and hand Him over to the rule and authority of the Governor.

When you get a chance to grab Him they were always going to take Him to Pilate. They had recently lost the authority to execute people. That's why they needed Pilate, who could do that.