

**Sermon**  
**20 January 2019**  
**West Kirk & Polbeth Harwood**

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Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

WK: Baptism

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Today we are taking a look at the parable of the tenants.

Please allow me to set the scene for you quickly: Jesus was in Jerusalem, not long before his arrest and crucifixion. He spent all the time he had talking to the people about God and what it meant to have faith.

He attracted large crowds of people who couldn't get enough of his stories, but among them were also those who didn't like him, because what he was saying didn't suit them...

During this time Jesus told lots of parables. Now, a parable is a story with a message.

Almost like little Red Riding Hood. We tell our kids this story, not because a wolf might eat their grannies and then pretend to be their grannies, but so they will understand that if we ask them to walk straight to their granny's house and not talk to strangers along the way, they will actually do that.

That's exactly why Jesus told parables – simple stories about things that happened every day, so his listeners could easily understand the meaning of what Jesus said and apply it to their lives.

The only problem for us today is – we live so many years after Jesus did, the images he used are not always as familiar to us as they were to his very first listeners.

But once we understand what Jesus wanted to teach them, we'll realise that the message behind all these stories are still just as true today as they were way back then.

So let's take a look at this parable: It's about tenants working in a vineyard.

Now I've never rented a vineyard from someone, but we all know that if you rent something – like a house, a flat, a car – it doesn't belong to you, but you may use it as long as you pay the owner the amount agreed between the two of you.

And we also know that you need to take care of it, because you'll have to hand it back in the same state you got it in, otherwise you'll have to pay for any damage you've caused.

Ministers are *almost* like tenants, because we live in a manse that is owned by the church.

So you can imagine what my heart did when my wee boy Henro was 3 years old and decided to doodle on the sitting room wall, with a red

crayon, all around the room... I tried everything – but the red stayed. Where the red came off, the paint came off the wall as well!

And of course this had to happen the day before we went away on holiday. So I decided to shamefully let the Property Convenor know about it, and I promised that we would make a plan as soon as we were back.

But guess what happened? While we were away the kind Property Convenor repainted the whole room, and for Christmas, he gave Henro a huge blackboard to draw on to his heart's content!

He didn't have to do that, but he was a lovely and kind man... Still I felt really bad for damaging property that didn't belong to me.

The tenants in our story weren't very nice. They didn't want to pay their due, in other words – they didn't want to do what was expected of them; they didn't hold up their end of the deal...

The landowner was very nice and patient with them, he even gave them a few opportunities to make things right, but they just went from bad to worse...

So, what is the deeper meaning here?

This parable refers to the relationship that existed between God and the Jews in old Testament times.

The landowner is God.

The vineyard is Israel. The land God gave his people to live in.

The tenants are the Jews.

The servants sent by the landowner to collect his fruit are the prophets.  
The people sent by God to tell the Jews time and again what God expected of them.

The revenue they wanted to collect was the correct way of living.

When none of this worked, the landowner sent his son. - Thinking that if his servants couldn't get the tenants to pay their due, they would respect his son more and give it to him.

His son, of course, was Jesus.

But they even rejected him...

*Dearie me, what a story!*

One can't help but wonder what the landowner will do next??

According to the rules and regulations of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world, the landowner had to retaliate for the death of his son. That was the only honourable thing left for him to do.

Remember, in those days they still lived by the rule: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.

By this time the landowner would already have lost so much honour in the eyes of society, because he didn't retaliate for the death of any of his servants. But this landowner is not like all the others.

To him the rules and regulations of society are not nearly as important as the people...

He actually changed the rules completely by sending his son, by explaining through his son that actually, loving someone more than yourself should be the only rule that served as the backbone of society.

The lesson Jesus wanted to teach the chief priests and the Pharisees, who thought they knew everything about God, was that they didn't own God.

That their lives were a gift from God.

They were like tenants here on earth.

They were so sure that they would inherit the kingdom of God just because of who they *were*, but Jesus wanted to teach them, and all the others there, and us too, that the kingdom of God belongs to all those who believe in him.

No matter who you are and where you come from, what you look like and what language you speak – as long as you believe in God, and live through your faith, the kingdom of God belongs to you.

The idea behind this parable was to wake them up and make them realise what they were doing. By rejecting God's messengers and his Son, by acting as if they owned something that did not belong to them, they were actually shutting themselves out of the kingdom of God. They needed to change their ways...

Today we might do things differently.

We have better tools and lots more knowledge to take proper care of this vineyard we call earth.

We have amazing technology and in a way we have the whole world at our feet.

But you know? We are still just tenants here on earth. We don't own the world. We are here to take care of it, and to give our landlord his due.

God gives us everything we need to make a success of our lives. Let's be thankful for that and use it to the best of our ability.

Let's not abuse our resources, let's respect those around us, and let's always remember what a huge privilege we have to be living here on earth.

Sometimes it's pure joy to work in this vineyard, but sometimes it's hard. Sometimes things happen to us that make us feel as if we are not in control of our own lives anymore, as if we are alone, as if we are never going to get through the day, never mind the rest of our lives.

But we should never despair, because not only does the earth belong to God, we belong to him too. And he loves us.

On the hard days, where we can't even see the grapes to pick for the tears welling up in our eyes, he will wipe our tears. He will pull us up from the ground.

And on the good days he will rejoice with us. He will make our joy contagious!

....., choose to live your lives in such a way that ..... will always be able to see the love of God in your eyes, feel the care of God in your hands and hear the joy of God in your voices.

Let's all bear the fruit of the spirit, so we can make God proud.

We are all just tenants here on earth. Let's be good tenants, who pay our landlord with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Because if we do that, not only will our vineyard flourish, but we will also inherit the kingdom of God.

Amen