

October 4, 2020 (Focus: Matthew 21:33-46)

Last week we reflected on the gospel, another parable with an agricultural illustration, about how we are called not just to be guardians of God's word, but more so to be gardeners, planting new growth in the foundation of God's Word, in the foundation of God's love and grace. For some, it resonated with them that we talked about not the kingdom of God, but the garden of God, full of wonderful foundational plants, the traditions of our faith that continue to give life to our faith, but a garden in which the traditions that no longer give life are pruned or dug up and thrown out, and room made for new seeds to be sown, new bulbs to be planted for future growth, for fruit that will feed the body and the soul. Yes, sometimes we need to plant new seeds, new ways of being a people of faith, different from what we planted before, a vision for a new day.

The kingdom of God that Jesus preached, this garden of earthly delights of God's love and grace, of peace and harmony, of acceptance and welcome to all – this was not a vision that all accepted. Where was the power structure that the elites were so used to enjoying? Why, his message talks nothing about money and how it showed that someone was blessed by God, a message that had served the elites so well for so long. Where was the fear, the tool so easily and readily used to control the unwashed masses? Why would we want peace and love and harmony, when that could mean we lose our status, our advantage, the guardians thought?

Here is Jesus, trying to preach a God of love and forgiveness, a saving God, a God of his own tradition, but for a new day, preaching this God in front of people who see themselves as guardians of a tradition more so than witnesses of a Creator God for their own time and context. God the Creator was one who created long ago, they thought, and forgot or conveniently ignored that God was always creating anew, and it was not something to fear, but to embrace.

Its interesting their response: when they realized that he was speaking about them, they wanted to arrest him, get him off the streets, get him away from the crowds, control him, control his message. We see this in our time too, people who want to control Jesus' message. It seems that for some, Jesus is no longer someone who's radical message is one that would get him locked up; no, for them, Jesus is one to have with them at their extravagant parties, invitation only parties, lavishly spread but only a select few are invited. And at their parties Jesus doesn't even get to speak; someone else speaks for him, offering what they think are his greatest hits, a few select phrases, all the while congratulating themselves

that he is at their party. But it is interesting that in their garden, there are only artificial flowers, and no room left for new seeds to be planted.

Jesus doesn't want to be at a lavish party with us. He wants to be with us out in the garden, planting new seeds, nurturing that which is growing, pruning that which is not, and making space for other gardeners to join us.

Let us turn our hearts and minds to God in prayer. Merciful God, we come to this time of prayer from the world, but the world is very much with us, for the concerns of all creation weigh heavy on our hearts, because we truly care, and because we know things could be better in our world. And so we offer in prayer today what is on our hearts,

We pray for all those whose needs are great and urgent in their lives, but with everything going on in the world, they don't make the news, they don't rise to our attention, but their needs are there none the less and deserving of our prayer and our attention and our help. And so we pray for:

- Those who are in need of healing, body and mind and spirit
- Those who mourn
- Parents and children, teachers and administrators trying to figure out schooling in these strange circumstances
- Families, and people living alone, each struggling in different ways in this pandemic and the forced togetherness or isolation it entails
- People struggling economically, especially those who have lost their jobs, that new paths are opened up to them
- Those continuing to fight fires out west, and those whose homes and communities are devastated by the fires
- Those living in communities devastated by storms, that recovery is swift
- Those who fight for equity and justice for all, no matter the color of their skin, their gender identity, their country of origin, or who they love

Breathe new breath into us, O Spirit of the living God. Fall afresh on us. Help us to breathe new life and new hope into our communities, especially in these uncertain times. With each breath we take, help us to be filled with your patience, your hope, your joy, your strength, your courage, your love.

Moment of silent meditation...

With each breath we take in and exhale, help us to remember that it is through us that your love and mercy flow, that your hope and a vision for a peaceable community of mutual respect and caring will be made real, as we taught to us by the one we call messiah, son of the living God, who taught us to pray to you saying, Our Father...