

## Written Copy: "Recklessly Patient Love Growing Repentant Faith"

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### Text: Luke 20:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup> And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup> But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

### The text's intent

Jesus tells a parable to show the consistent sinful refusal of the religious leaders throughout history to give to Him the fruit of repentant faith, and loving patience of the LORD as He works to move them to turn back to Him. They repeatedly show their refusal in their ignoring, slandering, and abusing the prophets He sends to call them back. Jesus then points to Himself, the Beloved Son, as the final witness to be sent. But He predicts how they will conspire to have Him cast out and killed. As a result, the LORD will remove these religious leaders from their positions of authority, will be destroyed in eternal hell, and in their place the LORD will build up a New Testament Church with Christ as the Cornerstone so they will give Him the fruits of repentant faith. All who refuse faith in this Cornerstone will be crushed in eternal damnation. Instead of taking heed and repenting, the religious leaders head out and fulfill Jesus' prophecy by planning how they might kill Him.

### Focus Statement:

Jesus is the loving, faithful, extremely generous Son who came to call us to repentant faith and became the final sacrifice that opens the door to that faith. He calls us to be His tenant farmers in His kingdom, and His Spirit moves us to turn our hearts and minds to focus back on Him in thankful repentant obedience to the Cornerstone of our faith, and away from selfish sinful worship of worldly things.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We can be like the tenant farmers in the parable, producing the selfish fruit that esteems the things of the world more than the LORD who gives us all things. And we ignore His Word that calls us to repentance.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Struggle and strive with the Spirit in repentant faith that turns us from worship of self and stuff back to Him, the cornerstone of our faith, who moves us to produce the fruits of repentant faith that share His extremely generous grace, being tools to prepare others for that Last Day upward call.

### Subject Sentence: Unbelievably generous love of Christ producing fruits

## **Introduction: Foolish Acts of Charity**

There was a man who was gifted with the skills of carpentry. His neighbor asked him to help build a shed for him out behind his house, and the man agreed, giving up his time on weekends, and some weeknights. Because of the man's skill and planning, the neighbor's shed was a sturdy structure that could hold his snow blower, lawn mower, and other lawn care equipment. But then one evening the neighbor, after one too many beers, decided to have a bonfire which he built too close to his shed, and it caught fire. He lost the shed, his snow blower, and lawn mower. Do you know what the man did for his neighbor? He let him borrow his snow blower and lawn mower, and then helped him build another shed, only to see him on another drunken evening burn that one down too. Then do you know what the man did for his neighbor? Would you believe he helped him rebuild his shed a third time? What would you call such a man? A fool?

Or how about the woman who heard her neighbor was home recovering from an operation, so she made her a tuna noodle casserole, stopping off at the store on her way home from work to buy all the ingredients so she could take it over for dinner that evening, while her family had to settle for leftovers. When the lady went back to retrieve the casserole bowl two days later, there sat the whole casserole, uneaten, left out on the counter, now spoiled. The neighbor told the lady dismissively that she "really didn't like tuna noodle casseroles". So, do you know what that lady did for her neighbor? She stopped on the way home from work the next night and bought everything needed to make beef stew and took that over to her instead, only to see her keep the beautiful dish the meal came in, with no thank you's offered. Yet the lady planned on making her neighbor a third meal two nights later. What would you call such a lady? A fool?

I think most of us would consider those two individuals to have gone over and above what is asked of us as Christian neighbors. In fact, we may have neighbors who are so ungrateful that we would be reluctant to do anything for them in the first place. With that in mind consider the actions of the Vineyard Owner in Jesus' parable in our Gospel Lesson.

## **What Christ is Saying to the Religious Leaders of His Day**

A man goes through all the work of planting a vineyard. Because he is going away, he arranges for tenant farmers to care for the vineyard in his absence, to cultivate and prune the vines, and pick the grapes. They can keep some of the crops for their own sustenance, but of course the vineyard owner wants his agreed upon share.

When the time comes for the harvest, the owner sends a servant to collect the percentage that belongs to him as the owner of the vineyard. Not only do these tenant farmers send the servant away empty handed, but they beat him, physically hurt him, all because he was following the owner's orders to collect the agreed upon amount due.

Now in Jesus' parables it's always useful to look for those moments and details that would make the audience stop and ponder in slack jaw amazement at what is going on. We have one right here in the tenant farmers beating the servant. The audience would be thinking, "Uh oh! Trouble coming!"

But instead, we have an even more amazing thing: the vineyard owner sends another servant, and to the amazement of Jesus' audience, he is treated even worse. What happens next? Retribution? Amazingly no! The vineyard owner sends a third servant, who is treated even worse than the first two! Now, time for retribution, right? No! Then comes the most recklessly stupefying move of all: the vineyard owner sends his own son whom he dearly loves. And what do they do to him? Drag him out of the vineyard and put him to death!

The actions of the vineyard owner seem unbelievably reckless and foolish, until we realize the vineyard owner in Jesus' parable represents God. Jesus is using this parable to illustrate how God has been dealing with His chosen people ever since they have come into the Promised Land. He gave them the land and everything they needed to thrive in it. And instead of returning the fruits of faith to Him, over and over again they kept it all for themselves, pleasing their sinful hearts by worshiping other gods, and turning worship of Him into worship of themselves. They made right standing with God all about what they do, how well they keep the law, instead of turning to Him and trusting in the sacrificial system to be His means of making them right before Him.

When we see this repeated sending of servants as the prophets God, sent to His Old Testament people time and again, to call them back to right standing with Him by faith, even though they ignored them, mistreated them, and slandered them, we see the loving patience of God at work, going over and above what we would ever do, to save them before it was too late. And the culmination of God's patient loving, merciful outreach to these hard-hearted sinners, He sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, whom they will drag outside the city of Jerusalem and put to death.

Jesus knows all this will happen, and yet He, out of amazing patient love, preaches this message to the very religious leaders who are plotting His death, to warn them, to call them back to repentance and faith before it's too late. And how will they respond? By gathering together and discussing how they can make His death happen. And what will be their fate because in their hard-heartedness they continued to refuse His call to repent? **Luke 20:16 He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"**

They respond in utter unbelief. ***"Surely not! This could never happen! We are Jews, in right standing as the bloodline of Abraham! We keep all the laws and have earned favor and right standing with Him. Jesus, you are dead wrong!"*** they think to themselves.

To this Jesus responds: **Luke 20:17-18** <sup>7</sup> **But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?”** <sup>18</sup> **Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”** He looks directly at them, looking them in the eyes, meeting their gaze. He wants them to hear this and take note. He quotes from Old Testament Scripture itself, from Psalm 118 that was prophetically looking forward to and giving warning about this very time. They are the leaders, those charged with building the people into a worshiping congregation that gives glory to the One true God who has blessed them beyond compare. They have taken this building and corrupted and destroyed it beyond repair by turning people away from God’s grace and to works righteousness, putting themselves forward as golden examples. The result? On Judgement Day they will find themselves broken and crushed forever in eternal damnation.

## **What Christ is Saying to You and Me**

That’s what Jesus is saying to those people of His day. But what is He saying to you and me?

First of all, you are not those religious leaders who beat and abused His messengers. At least you haven’t done that to me yet! Instead, you have come here because you confess and believe that this stone those builders rejected is the Cornerstone of your faith. You have been built on the faith that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. And you believe that the only way to be in right standing with God is through the faith He has given you in your baptism. The faith that confesses that Jesus earned your right standing by His perfect life, His suffering and death, and confirmed that His atoning sacrifice was enough by His resurrection. You and I are those to whom He has given the task of producing and sharing the fruits of that faith.

That being said, as we ponder the refusal of those tenant farmers in Jesus’ parable to give back the fruit God expected, let’s ponder how we are doing with the fruit He expects from us. The Apostle Paul used to be like one of those tenant farmers keeping the fruit God expected for himself in his works righteousness, thinking that who he was and what he did made him more deserving of God’s blessings than others. Christ came to him, called him, and gave him the Holy Spirit who changed his heart and mind in repentance. As a result, he says **Philippians 3:7-8** <sup>7</sup> **But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** <sup>8</sup> **Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ**

Ponder for a moment what your life in Christ looks like. Do you count the things and the ways that the world treasures as rubbish, like filthy waste only deserving to be thrown on the trash heap of rotting garbage? Or do some of those things call to your heart in ways they should not? Do you find that your life resembles your unbelieving neighbor more than it does your Lord and Savior who is the Cornerstone upon which you have been built? Do you entertain sinful thoughts and desires and lust? Do you follow the world's mantra of **"Get even"** when someone sins against you rather than Jesus' call to **"forgive as you have been forgiven"**? Do you hide your faith rather than share it with others? Do you gossip and say words that tear others down rather than build them up? Do you act in ways that should earn for you to be crushed in eternal damnation on the Last Day?

If you are honest, the answer to one, or more, or perhaps all, is shamefully, "Yes" But as your heart begins to break over this, remember the unbelievable, remarkable, forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ. He is the God whose Spirit comes to you to break your heart and rebuild it again filled with His love, and center it on Him as the cornerstone, the rock upon which your life and mine is to be built. He shows us that all these worldly things we prize and treasure, all these ways we live to please our sinful heart, all the ways we hide our faith are wrong. And in Confession and Repentance we throw them on the trash heap where they belong along with all the other rotten garbage of sin. Christ came to take up that rotten stinking garbage and took it to the cross to remove it from you and your life forever. Even though you did it, you are no longer judged by it, He was judged in your place.

And He gives you the words of Absolution: **"You are completely forgiven! I hold those sins against you no more!"** And how often does He do that? Over and over again, every day. He is the God who deals with us with seemingly remarkable and reckless grace. Paul says this about his life of repentant faith, **Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** The great Apostle Paul confesses that in his life he has not perfected the life of giving back to God the fruit of repentant faith, the life of love and obedience to God, and love and care for others that He deserves. But in repentance, he sees his failures, turns to God in confession, and with the words of the Absolution ringing in his head presses on toward the goal of living as a Christian whose cornerstone is Christ. He presses on prayerfully asking that the Lord would keep him focused on following Jesus because Jesus has made Paul His very own, just as Jesus is making you His very own.

With the words of the Absolution ringing in your ears, you can get up and follow your Lord once again. When we open our ears to His teachings on how we are to live, His word describes to us what those of fruits of selfless love for our fellow man look like. And when we fail to love others, we can demonstrate His great gift of patient and forgiving love as we ask forgiveness of others and work on forgiving them as Christ has forgiven us.

## Conclusion

I'm not sure I'm able to match the kind of reckless "foolish" patience and forgiveness illustrated in our opening stories. And Jesus does grant us godly wisdom to govern our use of our time, talents, and treasures. But remember how reckless and foolish His dealing with us would seem to the world. Remember that we are called to produce the fruit of faith that stands opposed to the self-centered fruit the world produces. Remember that we are called not to live for ourselves but live to serve our Lord and Savior in obedience by serving one another in selfless sacrificial love. Remember that you and I will fail at that time and again. Remember how those who fail to heed God's call to repent will, on the Last Day, be broken and crushed forever in eternal damnation. But, most importantly, remember that you are forgiven by the sacrificial and unconditional love of Christ. His Spirit is working in you, calling you back to Him, keeping you focused on Jesus and your life with Him and in Him now, and the upward call of eternal life with Him to come. Amen.