

Matthew 21:33-46 – What Seems to be Foolish

Most of us prefer to be thought of as mistaken rather than foolish. We do not tolerate fools. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. But today, we encounter a parable of a fool – the kind none of us wants to be and yet the kind of fool we depend upon to be saved.

A vineyard owner gives his property over to tenants for a share of the vineyard's fruit as his rent. When he goes to collect it, he loses at least three servants and finally his son trying to get what is his. We would call this man a fool. He has sacrificed his greatest treasure, his son, for something unworthy of his son's death. In the end, the evil tenants get precisely what they wanted – killing the son; they end up with the vineyard and all the fruit. But that is the point. Our God is not the savvy businessman but the compassionate Father.

Grace always seems weak in our eyes; worse, it seems foolish. But it is the triumph of this foolish grace that gives us hope – the hope of forgiveness for our many sins, the hope of redemption for our lost lives, and the hope of life for a people trapped in death. Our God is a fool by every earthly standard and yet His foolishness is wiser than wisdom and His grace beyond all telling. We count on this foolishness for salvation.

The owner of the vineyard is the Heavenly Father. He sent the prophets through the ages only to have them rejected and even killed because the people did not want to hear His word. When the fullness of time came, He sent forth His one and only Son, born of a Virgin, to redeem His lost creation. But this Christ was crucified as a common criminal and left to die alone on a cross that was not His.

What would you do to those tenants? The judgment of the world, indeed, our own voices, demands justice. They deserve to die. But that is the shock and scandal of grace. The judgment of the Lord is not against those who crucified Jesus but against those who refuse to be covered by His blood. He does not condemn those whose sins make them worthy of condemnation unless they refuse His mercy and grace.

This God is no fool. He is patient, loving, gracious, kind, and merciful. It is this wisdom that offended the Greeks and this sign that scandalized the Jews but it is this cross that saves. He died for all that those who live by Him should not live for themselves but for Him who saved them.

God is still raising up prophets to speak His word over and over to a world caught up in the darkness of sin and deaf to the sound of His voice. He sends forth His Spirit to break through the barriers of our doubt, fear, and rejection so that we believe.

God is still giving to the unworthy and undeserving what Christ merited and accomplished by His obedient suffering even to death on the cross. Where the Word of God is proclaimed in truth and purity, where the water of baptism still splashes over the heads of young and old, and where the bread which is Christ's body and the cup which is His blood still beckons sinners to come and eat and drink, God is at work calling, gathering, enlightening, sustaining, and keeping His people.

God is still calling a world of sinners to repentance – not just one repentance but to a daily repentance which reclaims us from each and every sin that catches us and steals us from the grasp of His love. He is patient in judgment and does not willingly send forth any sinner to eternal death. It is His gracious will that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth that is Christ and Him crucified.

So you have a God who is a fool, at least according to the world. And He calls us to be the same kind of fools. Fools like Sunday school classrooms with less than willing children. Fools like Flint Street Food Pantry that feeds the same hungry mouths over and over again. Sinners who are forgiven of their same old sins over and over again. The dying who are reclaimed to eternal life even though their bodies are surrendered to the grave.

We have a foolish God who has chosen mercy and He calls us to be foolish people who live this mercy before the world. Jesus tells a story which makes God into a fool but the star of this parable is the patient, gracious, and forgiving Father. You cannot help but be shocked because the tenants got exactly what they wanted – except they got it not by taking from the Father what He did not want to give but by receiving from Him what He gave for the life of the world – His one and only Son.

We expect judgment and judgment would be the result but what we get is the God of grace. His only Son is cast out of His vineyard and into death but this death becomes the source of forgiveness and life even for those who killed Him. Grace is not logical, reasonable, or comprehensible but it is wonderful. So I call you, to use St. Paul's words, to be fools for Christ's sake. Don't fear the world's judgment; live out the Lord's gracious gift. Be merciful as He is merciful and His will shall be done. Walk worthy of the compassionate love God has shown you.