

Oct. 6, 2002

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:33-46

Goal – Give God's share first, priorities, discipleship

Malady – Withholding, insubordination, accumulating, ownership mentality

Means – God's patient grace

This is a parable about relationships. It is a parable about our relationship with God. It is a parable about God's love, a clear reference to God sending Jesus as the messenger of God's love and salvation, a gift of God's grace, as prophesied in Psalm 118:22. It is a parable about faithfulness in discipleship, which may at times involve risk. Jesus is compared to the owner and we might be compared either to the messengers or the renters.

The consequences of poor stewardship are great (Matthew 25:19). The renters lose their jobs and their privileges. The kingdom of God is taken away from them (Matthew 25:28) and given to someone else. The focus of this parable is the owner, to whom everything belongs, who has a right to expect results, and who is praised and glorified in the sending of faithful messengers and workers in God's vineyard.

There is a big problem in accumulating – the more we have, the easier it is for our possessions to get in the way of our relationship with Jesus Christ. It doesn't help to put stock in our stock. All the material things of this world are slated for one big bonfire in the end, and it will be little comfort to those who say to each other, "My ash pile is bigger than your ash pile."

Messengers may get blamed, ridiculed, abused, rejected and killed. Throughout history people have given their lives for their faith. In this parable, all the messengers were killed, even the owner's son. Messengers who suffer death for Christ may give the ultimate gift of love. I don't covet martyrdom, and prefer to avoid it, yet I know that as a follower of Jesus Christ I may suffer for the message I proclaim.

The parable might also be applicable to us as tenants or stewards. A tenant is "one who rents, a steward." Have you ever rented an apartment? A farm? A U-Haul trailer? A car? What were your obligations to the owner? What might have been the consequences of failing to meet those responsibilities, e.g., a dent in that rental car? Do tenants sometimes not really care?

Have you ever looked at your relationship to the world as that of a renter or tenant? When we "own" that home, is that a permanent ownership? Is it really ours or are we still tenants and stewards of all our "possessions"? Have you ever looked at your relationship to your faith as that of a tenant or steward? In what ways are we lifelong renters?

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