

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A)

2 October 2011

Isaiah 5:1 - 7

*This Sunday, we will hear from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Since it is from chapter 5, we know that it is from Isaiah himself. Let's take a look at the **Biblical Timeline** to understand this book a little better.*

This passage, composed during the early years of Isaiah's ministry, takes the form of a popular ballad that one might sing at a harvest festival. It is possible that Isaiah sang it himself. It begins on a very happy note, but reveals a hard truth at the very end – God will destroy the people because they have not produced the harvest – they have not been faithful to his ways.

1 Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. **My friend had a vineyard** on a fertile hillside;

***My friend had a vineyard** speaks of the Lord and his chosen people, Israel.*

2 He spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; Within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

3 Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard:

4 What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

5 Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: Take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled!

6 Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briers; **I will command the clouds** not to send rain upon it.

***I will command the clouds:** after an apparently normal, human reaction to infertile crops, the tone clearly becomes divine.*

7 The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his cherished plant; He looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

***Judgment** – **mispah** - מִישַׁפָּח . . . **bloodshed** – **mispah** - מִישַׁפָּח . . . **justice** – **sedāqā** - שְׂדֵקָה . . . **outcry** – **seāqā** - שִׁקָּץ: in Hebrew, these adversative terms constitute a play on words.*

Matthew 21: 33 - 43

*This week, we continue to hear from Matthew's Gospel, picking up right where we left off last week. Since this is the first time we have looked at a gospel, let's examine the chart entitled **The Essential Elements of the Four Gospels**.*

Matthew presents another parable in which Jesus condemns the Jewish leaders. Let's compare it to Mark 12:1-12 to see similarities and differences. In this parable there is a close correspondence between most of the details of the story and the situation that it illustrates, the dealings of God with his people. Because of that heavy allegorizing, some scholars think that it does not in any way go back to Jesus, but represents the theology of the later church. That judgment applies to the Marcan parallel as well, although the allegorizing has gone farther in Matthew. There are others who believe that while many of the allegorical elements are due to church sources, they have been added to a basic parable spoken by Jesus. This view is now supported by the Gospel of Thomas, #65, where a less allegorized and probably more primitive form of the parable is found.

33 "Hear another parable. There was a **landowner** who **planted a vineyard**, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and **built a tower**. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey.

***Landowner:** an absentee landlord. Disputes between landlords and tenants were rather common in ancient Israel.*

***Planted a vineyard . . . a tower:** cf Isaiah 5:1-2. The vineyard is defined in Isaiah 5:7 as "the house of Israel."*

34 When vintage time drew near, he sent **his servants** to the tenants to obtain his produce.

***His servants:** Matthew has two sendings of servants as against Mark's three sendings of a single servant (Mark 11:2-5a) followed by a statement about the sending of "many others" (Mark 11:2,5b). That these servants stand for the prophets sent by God to Israel is clearly implied but not made explicit here, but see Matthew 23:37. His produce: cf Mark 12:2 "some of the produce." The produce is the good works demanded by God, and his claim to them is total.*

35 But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned.

36 Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way.

37 Finally, he sent his **son** to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'

Son: *the allegorical significance of the son is not so clear, especially if the story is original to the historical Jesus. We understand it speak of Jesus.*

38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and **acquire his inheritance.**'

Acquire his inheritance: *if a Jewish landowner died without heir, the tenants of his land would have final claim on it.*

39 They seized him, **threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.**

Threw him out . . . and killed him: *the change in the Marcan order where the son is killed and his corpse then thrown out (Matthew 12:8) was probably made because of the tradition that Jesus died outside the city of Jerusalem; see John 19:17; Hebrews 13:12.*

40 What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"

41 They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times."

Although Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, here we see an interesting Greek play on words; this is found only in Matthew.

They answered: *in Mark 12:9 the question is answered by Jesus himself; here the leaders answer and so condemn themselves; cf Matthew 21:31. Matthew adds that the new tenants to whom the vineyard will be transferred will give the owner the produce at the proper times.*

42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes'?"

Cf Psalm 118:22-23. The psalm was used in the early church as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection; see Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7. If, as some think, the original parable ended at Matthew 21:39 it was thought necessary to complete it by a reference to Jesus' vindication by God.

43 Therefore, I say to you, the **kingdom of God** will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.

Kingdom of God: *Peculiar to Matthew (see the note on Matthew 19:23-24). Its presence here instead of Matthew's usual "kingdom of heaven" may indicate that the saying came from Matthew's own traditional material. A people that will produce its fruit: believing Israelites and Gentiles, the church of Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6 - 9

*We hear another section from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Let's consult the **Biblical Timeline** again to understand the letter a little better. Paul wrote this letter to the community he had founded in Philippi while he was imprisoned. Since we do not know to which imprisonment he is referring, it is difficult to date the writing accurately. It continues the theme we heard in last week's second reading from the Book of Romans; we live and die in Christ.*

6 Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

7 Then **the peace of God** that **surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts** and minds in Christ Jesus.

***The peace of God...will guard your hearts:** The peace that is God is personified – like a sentinel, it will stand guard over the hearts and minds of Christians.*

***Surpasses all understanding:** this is true both because the limited mind of human beings cannot comprehend it and such a state of serenity surpasses all human efforts to attain it.*

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **gracious**, if there is any **excellence** and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

***True...honorable...just...pure...lovely...gracious...excellence:** The language employs terms from Greek Stoic philosophy.*

9 Keep on doing **what you have learned** and received and heard and seen **in me**. Then the God of peace will be with you.

***What you have learned...in me:** Cf the note on Phil 3:17. Paul gives these Greek philosophical concepts a new context – for they have been learned through his teaching about Christ. If they pursue these ideals, then the God of peace will be with them.*

In its beginning, today's Gospel almost repeats the first reading from Isaiah. Then, we see a significant shift. Whereas the prophet Isaiah presents a cruel God who is preparing to destroy Judah, our Lord, although condemning those who are unwilling to follow God's command, shows God's faithful love for those who are willing to repent (e.g., tax collectors and prostitutes) and change their ways, following our Lord. As we approach the end of the Liturgical calendar – Advent begins on the last Sunday of November – we hear our Lord speak over

and over again about the Day of Judgment to encourage us to turn back to God's ways and bear good fruit!