

“HOW IS YOUR GARDEN GROWING?”
**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW (21:33-46) AND PRESENTED FOR
ORLEAN UMC ON OCTOBER 4, 2020-----**

**YOU KNOW.....JESUS COULD HAVE JUST SAID,
“GET READY FOR ANOTHER CONFRONTATION
BETWEEN THE PHARISEES AND ME.”**

**BUT REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT
THE PHARISEES YOU’VE GOT TO GIVE THEM
SOME CREDIT TODAY..... TODAY THEY GOT IT!
TODAY THEY UNDERSTOOD THE PARABLE.**

THEY HEARD JESUS.

“THEY REALIZED HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THEM.”

JESUS HELD BEFORE THEM A TRUTH THEY DIDN'T LIKE AND THEY WANTED TO PUT A STOP TO IT..... THEY WANTED TO ARREST HIM.

THIS IS NEITHER JESUS' FIRST NOR HIS LAST CONFRONTATION WITH THE PHARISEES..... WE TEND TO AVOID THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION.....EVEN GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO AVOID THAT DISCOMFORT AND DISTRESS THAT COMES WITH CONFLICT.....

BUT NOT JESUS. HE JUST KEEPS ON COMING.

AT EVERY TURN HE IS OFFENDING,

AGGRAVATING, AND CONFRONTING THE

PHARISEES. HE EATS WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE.

HE WON'T ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS. HE

TAUNTS THEM BY BREAKING THE LAW AND

HEALING ON THE SABBATH. HE CALLS THEM

HYPOCRITES AND BLIND LEADERS. HE ESCAPES

THEIR TRAPS. HE LEAVES THEM SPEECHLESS.

HE RATTLES OFF A STRING OF "WOES" AGAINST

THEM. HE COMPARES THEM TO A DISOBEDIENT

SON WHO WILL NOT WORK IN THE VINEYARD.

THEY JUST CAN'T CATCH A BREAK WITH JESUS.

HE NEVER LETS UP.

**SO WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT? WHY CAN'T HE
JUST LET GO OF THEM? AND WHAT DOES THAT
HAVE TO DO WITH US?**

**IS JESUS LOOKING FOR A FIGHT? I DON'T THINK
SO. IS HIS PRIMARY MOTIVATION TO EXPOSE
AND CONDEMN THOSE WHO DO NOT FOLLOW
HIM? I DON'T THINK SO. IS HE KEEPING SCORE
AND NAMING ALL THE ATTITUDES AND
BEHAVIORS OF THE PHARISEES THAT HE
CONSIDERS WRONG? I DON'T THINK SO. IS
JESUS TRYING TO EXCLUDE FROM THE
KINGDOM OF GOD THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF
HIS DAY? I DON'T THINK SO.**

HERE'S WHAT I THINK THESE CONFRONTATIONS
ARE ABOUT. JESUS IS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP
ON THE PHARISEES, OR ANYONE ELSE FOR
THAT MATTER. JESUS IS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP
ON YOU OR ME. HE JUST KEEPS ON COMING.
THAT IS THE GOOD NEWS, HOPE, AND JOY IN
TODAY'S PARABLE!

THIS IS NOT SO MUCH A PARABLE OF
EXCLUSION OR CONDEMNATION AS IT IS A
PARABLE OF JESUS' UNWILLINGNESS TO GIVE
UP.

HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO GIVE UP ON US OFTEN
CONFRONTS US WITH TRUTH ABOUT OUR LIVES
THAT IS ALMOST ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO HEAR
AND ACCEPT. WE MIGHT HEAR HIS WORDS BUT
DO WE REALIZE HE IS TALKING ABOUT US?

*THIS PARABLE AND THE CONFRONTATION THIS
PARABLE PROVOKES ARE LIKE A MIRROR HELD
BEFORE US SO THAT WE MIGHT SEE AND
RECOGNIZE IN OURSELVES WHAT JESUS SEES
AND RECOGNIZES..... THIS IS NOT TO CONDEMN
US BUT TO RECOVER US FROM THE PLACES OF
OUR SELF-EXCLUSION, TO CALL US BACK TO
LIFE, AND TO LEAD US HOME.*

JESUS DOESN'T EXCLUDE US OR ANYONE ELSE
FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD. HE DOESN'T HAVE
TO. WE DO IT TO OURSELVES AND WE'RE
PRETTY GOOD AT IT. THAT'S WHAT THE
PHARISEES HAVE DONE. THE PHARISEES HAVE
EXCLUDED THEMSELVES.

“THE KINGDOM OF GOD WILL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU,” JESUS SAYS TO THEM. THIS IS NOT SO MUCH A PUNISHMENT FOR FAILING TO PRODUCE KINGDOM FRUITS. IT IS, RATHER, THE RECOGNITION OF WHAT ALREADY IS. THEY WERE GIVEN THE VINEYARD AND FAILED TO PRODUCE AND SHARE THE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM.

JESUS IS JUST NAMING THE REALITY, THE TRUTH. THEY HAVE EXCLUDED THEMSELVES. IN THE SAME WAY, *THE KINGDOM OF GOD WILL BE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY PRODUCING KINGDOM FRUITS. THIS IS NOT A REWARD BUT A RECOGNITION OF WHAT ALREADY IS. WHERE THE FRUIT IS, THERE ALSO IS THE KINGDOM.*

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM LOOK LIKE THEN LOOK AT THE LIFE OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST.....

WHAT DO YOU SEE? LOVE, INTIMACY, MERCY
AND FORGIVENESS, JUSTICE, GENEROSITY,
COMPASSION, PRESENCE, WISDOM, TRUTH,
HEALING, RECONCILIATION, SELF-SURRENDER,
JOY, THANKSGIVING, PEACE, OBEDIENCE,
HUMILITY. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THESE
THINGS AS ABSTRACT IDEAS BUT AS LIVED
REALITIES IN THE VINEYARDS OF OUR LIVES.

WE'VE ALL BEEN GIVEN VINEYARDS. THEY ARE
THE PEOPLE, RELATIONSHIPS, CIRCUMSTANCES
AND EVENTS OF OUR LIVES THAT GOD HAS
ENTRUSTED TO OUR CARE.

THAT MEANS OUR SPOUSE AND MARRIAGE,
CHILDREN AND FAMILY, FRIENDS, OUR WORK,
OUR CHURCH, OUR DAILY DECISIONS AND
CHOICES, OUR HOPES, DREAMS, AND
CONCERNS ARE THE VINEYARDS IN WHICH WE
ARE TO REVEAL THE PRESENCE AND LIFE OF
GOD, TO PRODUCE THE FRUITS OF THE
KINGDOM..... THE VINEYARDS, OUR WORK IN
THOSE VINEYARDS, AND THE FRUIT PRODUCED
COME TOGETHER TO SHOW US TO BE SHARERS
IN GOD'S KINGDOM; OR NOT.

**TO THE DEGREE WE ARE NOT PRODUCING
KINGDOM FRUITS WE HAVE EXCLUDED
OURSELVES FROM AND REJECTED OUR SHARE
IN THE KINGDOM..... WE ARE LIVING NEITHER
AS THE PEOPLE GOD KNOWS US TO BE NOR AS
THE PEOPLE WE TRULY WANT TO BE..... *IN SOME
WAY WE HAVE STEPPED OUTSIDE OF
OURSELVES AND SIDESTEPED OUR OWN LIFE.***

**THAT'S THE TRUTH WITH WHICH JESUS
CONFRONTED THE PHARISEES. IT'S THE SAME
TRUTH WITH WHICH JESUS CONFRONTS US.**

**HOW DOES THAT HAPPEN? WHAT DOES SELF-
EXCLUSION LOOK LIKE? HERE'S WHAT I'M
WONDERING.**

- ***DO YOU EVER STRUGGLE WITH PERFECTIONISM, SELF-CONDEMNATION, AND THE QUESTION OF WHETHER YOU'RE ENOUGH? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***
- ***DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE TO BE IN CONTROL, BE RIGHT, HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***
- ***ARE YOU CARRYING GRUDGES, ANGER, RESENTMENT? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***
- ***DO YOU LOOK AT OTHERS AND BEGIN MAKING JUDGMENTS ABOUT THEIR BELIEF, CHOICES, OR LIFESTYLE? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***

- ***ARE THERE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO LET GO OF RATHER THAN DO THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION AND HEAL THE RELATIONSHIP? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***
- ***DO YOU GO THROUGH LIFE ON AUTO-PILOT, GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS BUT NEVER REALLY BEING PRESENT, NEVER SHOWING UP? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***
- ***IN YOUR LIFE IS THERE MORE CRITICISM AND CYNICISM THAN THANKSGIVING AND CELEBRATION? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***

- ARE YOU HANGING ONTO SOME OLD GUILT THAT YOU BELIEVE COULD NOT BE FORGIVEN? MAYBE THAT'S SELF-EXCLUSION.***

THE ANTIDOTE TO OUR SELF-EXCLUSION FROM GOD'S KINGDOM BEGINS WITH FIRST RECOGNIZING THAT SELF-EXCLUSION..... THAT MEANS WE MUST LOOK AT THE VINEYARDS OF OUR LIVES..... SO, HOW'S YOUR GARDEN GROWING? WHAT DO YOU SEE? IS THERE FRUIT? IS THERE LIFE? ARE YOU SHARING IN GOD'S KINGDOM?

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN.....**