



Sunday, October 4, 2020
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Holy Communion

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells a vineyard parable, which serves as an image of Israel, the prophets' mission, and Christ's death. For Christians, the vineyard also speaks of God's love poured out in the blood of Christ, given to us for the forgiveness of sin. Grafted onto Christ the vine at baptism, we are nourished with wine and bread so that we may share Christ's sufferings and know the power of his resurrection.

WELCOME! We are glad to have you join us in worship today. Here are a few notes to help you feel more at home participating in our worship.

Worshiping. Today's service is printed in this bulletin. Parts in bold indicate responses by everyone in which you are invited to participate.

Adjustments to our service. In order to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines, it will be mandatory that everyone have a face covering and everyone must be mindful of keeping their distance from others. Please refrain from mingling in confined spaces before and/or after service.

Other adjustments are:

- Congregational singing is discouraged. If you feel you must, please sing softly with your mask in place.
- The sign of the PEACE will be offered by a wave or bow while staying in place.
- The OFFERING PLATE will not be passed or brought forward. It will be in the back of the sanctuary instead.
- If this is a service of HOLY COMMUNION, communion elements will be available as you exit the sanctuary.
- At the conclusion of the service, everyone is asked to remain in their pew. Ushers will dismiss people by row to maintain safe spacing.
- The Sanctuary, Narthex and Broadway lobby are the only areas open. All other areas of St. Stephen's are closed.

Prayer Requests. Please call the office if you'd like to place someone on our prayer list.

PRELUDE: You Are All We Have

+ GATHERING +

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

P In the name of the Father,
and of the + Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

P God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

P Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P Gracious God,

C have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things we have done and things we have failed to do. Turn us again to you, and uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

P God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of + Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

C Amen.

GATHERING SONG: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* (ELW 803)

All are invited to listen.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

GREETING

P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C And also with you.

CALL TO WORSHIP

P On this new morning and in every moment of our lives, gracious God,

C from generation to generation, we praise your holy name.

P Like our ancestors before us, we proclaim your greatness to our children,

C for we have seen your deeds of power and witnessed your goodness in our lives.

P As you have opened your hand to all, satisfying the desire of every living thing

C open our hearts so that we might share the gifts we have received from you.

Let us worship God in gratitude and joy!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Let us pray. Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

+ WORD +

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 5:1-7

The prophet sings a sad, parable-like love song about the relationship between God and Israel. In this song Israel is compared to a promising vineyard. Despite God's loving care, the vineyard that is Israel has brought forth "wild grapes" of injustice and distress, when fine grapes of justice and righteousness were expected.

A reading from Isaiah.

¹Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

²He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

³And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.

⁴What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.

⁶I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

...The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

PSALM: PSALM 80:7-15

*The psalm for the day is read responsively. The lector will read the plain text and all are invited to read the text in **bold**.*

⁷Restore us, O | God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we | shall be saved.

⁸**You have brought a vine | out of Egypt;
you cast out the nations and | planted it.**

⁹You cleared the | ground for it;
it took root and | filled the land.

¹⁰**The mountains were covered | by its shadow
and the towering cedar trees | by its boughs.**

¹¹You stretched out its tendrils | to the sea
and its branches | to the river.

¹²**Why have you broken | down its wall,
so that all who pass by pluck | off its grapes?**

¹³The wild boar of the forest has | ravaged it,
and the beasts of the field have | grazed upon it.

¹⁴**Turn now, O | God of hosts,
look | down from heaven;**

¹⁵behold and | tend this vine;
preserve what your right | hand has planted.

SECOND READING: Philippians 3:4b-14

Paul reviews some of his supposed credentials, which no longer have any bearing in comparison to the right relationship he has been given through the death of Christ. The power of Christ's resurrection motivates him to press on toward the ultimate goal, eternal life with Christ.

A reading from Philippians.

[Paul writes:] ^{4b}If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his

resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

...The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus tells a parable to the religious leaders who are plotting his death, revealing that their plans will, ironically, bring about the fulfillment of scripture.

P The holy gospel according to Matthew.

C Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the people:] ³³“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord’s doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes’?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

...The gospel of the Lord. **C Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: *I Come with Joy* (ELW 482)

All are invited to stand and listen as the Word of God is proclaimed in song.

*I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved, and free,
the life of Jesus to recall
in love laid down for me,
in love laid down for me.*

APOSTLES' CREED

A With the whole Church, we confess our faith.

C **I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

A Holy God, you call us to work for peace and justice in your vineyard. Refresh the church with your life, that we may bear fruit through work and service. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A Thank you for the abundant harvest of the earth. Bless and care for those whose hands bring the fruits of the earth to the tables of all who hunger. May we be inspired by your servants who cared deeply for your creation. Lord, in your mercy,
C hear our prayer.

A Curb the impulses of greed and pride that lead us to take advantage of others. Grant that world leaders seek the fruits of the kingdom for the good and welfare of all people. Lord, in your mercy,
C hear our prayer.

A Sustain all who suffer with the promise of new life. Assured of your presence, heal our pain and suffering, and equip us to embrace all bodies aching for wholeness of mind, body, and soul. We call to mind those who are struggling today, especially Romaine, Susan and all those we name aloud or in the silence of our hearts...*brief silence*... Lord, in your mercy,
C hear our prayer.

A We pray for all managers in our community and for all who seek employment. Give hope and a future to those who lack meaningful work, those who have been marginalized or abused in the workplace, and those who desire new opportunities. Lord, in your mercy,
C hear our prayer.

A Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
C Amen.

PEACE

The presiding minister and the assembly greet each other in the peace of the risen Christ.

P The peace of Christ be with you always.

C And also with you.

The people may greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace with a wave or bow while staying in place.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE: *Guide My Feet*

+ MEAL +

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
who preached good news to the poor,
and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension,
we await his coming in glory.
Pour out your Holy Spirit,
that by this Holy Communion we may know
the unity we share with all your people
in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, now and forever.
C Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

P Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**C Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Communion will be distributed at the conclusion of our worship service as you exit the sanctuary. After the presiding minister hands you the wafer, take one individual cup of wine or juice, partake of communion and dispose of the used cup.

+ SENDING +
God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

BLESSING

P The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and † give you peace.
C **Amen.**

SENDING SONG: *Jesus Loves Me!* (ELW 595)
All are invited to listen.

*Jesus loves me! this I know,
for the Bible tells me so;
little ones to him belong,
they are weak, but he is strong.*

Refrain
*Yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
yes, Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so.*

DISMISSAL

A Go in peace. Christ is with you.
C **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE: We Praise You

Call to Confession

Throughout his ministry in Matthew's gospel, Jesus draws in people at the margins of society. As the leader of a reform movement, Jesus spoke as a Jew to fellow Jews. When we read these stories centuries later, we must remember that his intent was to condemn exclusion and abuses of power—*not* to reject Judaism. His critiques still ring true for the power structures of the religious institutions of our time.

Jesus' parables stirred people up, provoking questions, doubts, even hostility. When his listeners recognized themselves in the parables, it was rarely comforting or affirming. Do we have the honesty and vulnerability to see ourselves critically in the stories as the chief priests and Pharisees did?

There aren't any clear heroes in this story, as in any story of class warfare. Perhaps the tenants turned to violence out of frustration with the economic injustice of their situation. The Pharisees were quick to side with the powerful landowner, asserting his right to kill the tenants and crush their revolt, yet Jesus does not affirm this escalation either.

We begin worship with a prayer of confession, recalling the image of God's goodness in each of us and yet honestly admitting our shame and guilt. Today's parable also issues a call to confession, alluding to the vineyard of Isaiah 5, which yielded wild grapes instead of sweet. God has created a world that can provide abundant life for all. What are the fruits of our congregations? God's heart longs for justice for all people. How might we unintentionally and unknowingly cultivate the sour wine of exclusion, discrimination, and injustice?

In the prayer of the day, we ask: "Beloved God, . . . lead us . . . to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them." Empowered by God's grace and forgiveness, we set to work removing the blinders that keep us from recognizing ourselves in parables' antagonists and repenting of the injustices that we perpetuate.