

March 13, 2016
Luke 20:9-20

Lent 5C
A Tense Encounter

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

We've all been there before. You can feel it. It's strong. It fills the room. If you could, you would be able to cut it with a knife. Sometimes it happens when two people have conflict and the rest of the room full of people can feel it. Perhaps it's when two people are duking it in a championship wrestling or boxing match or MMA. You feel it when two highly ranked teams are battling it out to win the game. What about when your favorite team is leading a tight game into the final minutes or your favorite team reaches over time on a miracle play. You even feel it when there is a close political race that will change the course of history...sometimes for the better...and sometimes for the worse. I often feel it during this time of year...March Madness, when the number 16 team leads the number 1 seed at half time and try to survive and take out the giant. The "it" I am referring to is tension. We've all been in those tense situations.

Today in our text, it is tense. It's Tuesday during Holy Week and things are picking up speed. Jesus is two days removed from entering into Jerusalem with a victory parade, where if this was a political race, he would have been up in the polls, but just days later the race was closer, and perhaps he even lost his lead. Jesus has much more to teach, and his time is drawing to a close. Here he picks up his pace, he more than anyone feels the tension, so he shares with the people this parable of the Wicked Tenants.

A man planted a vineyard and then he rented it out to tenants and he left and went to another country for quite a long time. When the harvest was at hand he sent a servant to the tenants to gather some of the fruit but they beat him and sent him away. The landlord sent another, but they also beat him and treated him shamefully and sent him away. The third they wounded and cast him out. Finally the owner thought to himself and said, *"I will send my beloved son, perhaps they will respect him."* When the tenants saw him they said to each other... *"This is the heir; let's kill him, so that the inheritance is ours."* These tenants wanted what they thought was theirs. They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The landlord will then come and destroy those tenants and give those tenants to others.

The Scribes and Chief Priests know who Jesus was talking about and they didn't like it, so the tensions grew even higher. They were growing higher and they killed Jesus because of it. Lenski in his commentary notes: "They killed Jesus because they feared to lose their position and their power over the nation. Their blind unbelief hid the spiritual nature of the kingdom from them..." They killed Jesus because the tension had increased so much that they rejected God's Word, rejected the Messiah. They figured if they didn't he would "win".

Let's look at this parable from a different direction. The vineyard is the Old Testament Church, God's People. The tenants were the leaders of the people, especially the

spiritual leaders, the Elders, priests, teachers of the law. The servants represent the prophets bringing God's Word to His people, warning them of what is to come. If we think back to the history of Israel, how often did they listen to God's Word? Rarely. Instead they mistreated the prophets. They didn't respect the prophets. Even the last of the Old Testament/Old Covenant Prophets, John the Baptist, they tormented him until he was killed. They would not listen to what they had to say. They rejected God's Word.

What if this was happening today? It is happening today, isn't it? We are rejecting the very Word that God has given to us. We are continuously chasing after other gods, not respecting authority, breaking the Sabbath Day and so much more. We neglect to give back to our landlord, the owner of this World.

God the Father definitely has patience with His people, who are at the same time sinners. Sinners needing to hear that they need to change, they need to repent. Much like the Children of Israel and Her leaders in the Old Testament to the Pharisees, Scribes, and Chief Priests in the context of our text. We too need to hear that we need to change, that we need to repent.

God is patient with us as well. How often does He send people into our lives to bring us back to Him? Yet what happens. How often do we like God's people of old reject Him and reject His Word?

It happens quite often. There are times when God sends people into our lives to bring us to repentance and they share God's Word with us and we squirm, we don't like it. We cast people away. Perhaps we just remove ourselves from those situations. We don't go to church because we are afraid that the pastor will "talk about" me. We think, "how did he find out about what I was doing behind closed doors?" Perhaps he even talks about how I don't give back to God what is actually His.

One thinks it's the man...but really it's God's Word convicting you. After all it's God's Word that talks to you and many times you and I rebel. We reject God's Word and we want to go a different direction. When we reject God's Word we reject the Messiah, and then we deserve to die.

There's this thing called tension as well. When we live and work and play and worship with other people, tension can build. We've experienced it. Oftentimes when tension builds, we become short with one another and our words and actions become sinful and through that sinful behavior we reject God and His Word for us. Perhaps this Lent is a time to repent and let God break that tension.

Let's get back to our text. God is patient with His people, He sends His prophets and the people don't listen to them. They grumbled against Moses for 40 years in the wilderness, Elijah had to escape for his life, tradition states Isaiah was sawed in two, Jeremiah lived to be an old man but then was stoned to death. We all know the story that John the Baptist was beheaded. The prophets were not treated kindly. Finally,

God said, “the time has come, now I will send my beloved Son, my only Son, the one I love.”

In our text could you hear overtones from Christ’s baptism and transfiguration? “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.” Those words were spoken by God the Father. God is sending His one and only Son into the world to gather what is rightfully his, but what happens?

In just one week from now we will be celebrating Palm Sunday; we will be entering into Holy Week, the Passion Week of our Lord. We know what is going to happen...we are going to visit the upper room where Jesus will institute the Lord’s Supper, where Jesus will continue to teach His Apostles. Jesus will then head out into the Garden to pray, where one of his own, Judas will betray him. Jesus will be arrested and put on trial, lies will be spoken about him, he will be scourged and beaten, whipped, bloodied, and bruised. He will be cast outside the city walls, hung on a cross and crucified. He will be humiliated. He will die for the sins of the people, be buried in the tomb.

Jesus Christ is indeed the stone that the builders rejected. He was thrown out of the city. He is the stone that is now the cornerstone. He is the cornerstone of the church. For the Church is built on him, who is the foundation, and His Word and His death, burial, and his ultimate resurrection on that third day. He is also the Cornerhead...the cornerstone where all the angles of the church are built upon.

This stone that the builders rejected, people will fall on and for others the stone will crush them. Dr. Arthur Just in his commentary quotes: “Everyone will be broken or crushed. Those who believe in him, disciples, must fall into the brokenness of repentance in order to be raised again as new beings, living stones in Christ, the temple of God. But upon unbelievers comes the crushing blow of judgment.” Just comments, “The hearer knows that Jesus’ crucifixion will become the ultimate stumbling block, as St. Paul relates to the Corinthians: “*We preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles*” and to the Romans, “*They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.’*”

This crucifixion is definitely a stumbling block for all, but yet as disciples of Christ it’s a stumbling block only for us as it breaks us with repentance. As we repent and are forgiven in Christ, we are raised as new beings, living stones in Christ.

What is the good news in the text? The Son is killed and the Chief Priests and the Scribes are plotting to kill Jesus? The good news is this. Jesus Christ came to die. That is exactly why the Father sent him. It’s what was prophesied of old and what he even spoke about in His life and ministry. Jesus Christ came to die for your sins and mine. Even though we do at times reject Him and His word, He is still faithful to us. He is patient with us and forgives our sins. Jesus Christ didn’t just come to die though...He

came to live. In just two weeks we will gather to celebrate the great resurrection. The resurrection that grants life to all those who have faith in Him.

Jesus Christ is the reason that we have life and have it abundantly. He is the payment for the rent that could not be paid. The Father is our landlord and the debt needed to be paid is paid. It's paid through the Beloved Son. Jesus paid that debt by his crucifixion on the cross.

And that cross, it's pretty much the center of Christianity, it's in our homes, churches. We wear it on our clothes. Not just as something beautiful, but as something that reminds us of what Jesus did. Even our sanctuary is shaped in the shape of a cross.

The cross was necessary. It was necessary for Jesus to die. It was necessary for Jesus to live again.

Dear family of God, the tension is rising. It's not because the brackets for the Men's College Basketball Tournament are announced later today. It's because of the parable before us this morning. The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is not going to end well for someone. One wrong step could mean death for the religious leaders, but they are evil, they know what to do. Jesus is going to pay. And that is exactly what happens. The tensions continue to increase all week. They even question him who is to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus foretells the destruction of the Jerusalem. Tension is building. Tension is even building in hell. The Devil is beginning to smile; he thinks he is going to win. Tension reaches an all-time high in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas betrays Jesus and Peter cuts off the ear of one of the guards. Peter denies his Lord and repents. Tension builds as Jesus is going through those trials as the crowds shout, "Crucify Him! Release Barabbas!" Tension builds as Jesus walks that lonely road to Calvary. Tension builds as Jesus is hung on the cross to die. Jesus dies and it seems as everything is over. It seems as if the tension of this conflict is over. But it builds back up when Jesus bursts out of the tomb. And now Jesus is alive and promises us life...even in a time and place when tension is picking up again. Jesus is your life. Jesus is the one that can break the tension in your lives and give you life. Jesus is the one that can heal your tense relationships and bring you through the tense moments in life. Jesus is your life! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Lenten King. Amen.