

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT
March 21, a.D. 2010
Luke 20: 9 – 20

It is the final week for Him who created the sun and moon and so gathered days into weeks. The gospels preserve much of his teaching that final week when God died. The parable of the tenant farmers was spoken in the temple of Jerusalem. Jesus had cried out for Jerusalem and wanted to gather her together like a mother hen gathering chicks. Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and how complete the devastation when he says to the Palm Sunday crowd: They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. Not even two stones will be left on top of each other.

It came to pass in the year of Our Lord 70. The temple in Jerusalem, which was cleansed twice by Jesus, was also brought down. Yes it was made of magnificent stones. But these were no match for Roman battering rams and the hungry flames of Titus that devoured it. If the temple is gone, where will God's people meet Him? Where will they gather in His Name to receive what He offers them? If the building is gone, does that mean the end of religion?

Before Jesus answers those questions, he speaks the parable of the wicked tenant farmers who were suppose to pay rent to the owner with a portion of the harvest. Each time the owner sent his servants to collect the wicked tenant farmers increased their violent attacks against them and sent them away empty-handed. Until the owner's son was sent, and was killed. By doing so, the wicked tenant farmers foolishly thought they would seize the vineyard.

The meaning of the parable is clear. The son is Jesus who was killed by the religious establishment in Jerusalem. God sent his prophets to Israel in order to seek the fruit of repentance. God did this several times. But what happened? What did God receive for planting his vineyard, which Isaiah described, is Israel? God expected the fruit of faith from his people, but what did he receive instead?

Before those questions can be answered, it is important to remember that God created Israel by calling Abraham to faith and blessed his family to become a mighty nation. Nothing can create itself. Everything is made by God. He made all things in such a way that everything could not have been made any better.

It is this one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit who is eagerly asking for the fruit of faith from his people? What did he find? A nation wanting a war with Rome to gain power and freedom! A people who thought they deserved praise and had earned the right to be called the people of God. A religious establishment in Jerusalem that was so wicked, it offered up God's Son to Rome to be crucified and thought that by executing Jesus, they were doing God a favour. It didn't matter anymore what the bible clearly taught.

God acted. God destroyed Jerusalem by Roman battering rams and fire. He sentenced the religious establishment of Jerusalem to hell for unbelief. The fruit of unbelief was witnessed when they willingly and knowingly putting God's Son to death. And then He gave his vineyard to others. God opened his kingdom to all believers. Believers are those who do not boast of their accomplishment and self-made works of righteousness but confess they deserve to go to hell for unbelief, trusting God to forgive them, heal them and re-make them into something new.

God is truly amazing. He humbles the proud and brings them low. He takes the lowly things and brings them to a higher place. His glory is manifested in the rejection of His Son. God takes the stone which the builders rejected and makes it into the chief cornerstone. Jesus was despised and rejected by men. But God exalted him to the highest place. God reverses the wisdom and the values of the world.

Jesus is the rejected stone. Everyone will be broken or crushed. Those who believe in him, must fall into the brokenness of repentance in order to be raised again as new living stones in Christ. Those who continue in proud unbelief and boast in themselves, will receive the crushing blow of judgment just as Jerusalem's stones were crushed and toppled to the ground.

The death of God on the cross is the ultimate stumbling block or stone. But for the faithful who believe the God who said: 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 [Christ] will not be put to shame.

The body of Jesus is the new temple. It is not a building made with the hands of men. It is each baptized child of God, made into a new and living stone, built on Christ

the cornerstone of a new Zion, which is the church of all ages. Come quickly Lord and save us. Your holy, innocent death is our life forever!