

*St. John's, Tappahannock, VA*  
*Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost*  
*October 5, 2008*

*“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.”*

*The Rev. William T. Pickering*

I. The parable about the vineyard in the Gospel for this morning is about as subtle as a brick!

A. Those to whom the care of the gifts from God had been given were not returning their share and were terrible stewards of God's richness. They also murdered the servants of God – even God's own Son and heir.

1. The Pharisees were really angry, because they could not have missed that Jesus was talking to and about them – Israel was the tenants and the Pharisees were the leaders of Israel. It was their lack of basic gratitude, responsibility and accountability that Jesus was presenting in his casual story. They represented those who killed the prophets, and they were planning to kill Jesus.

2. To make matters worse the comparison of Israel with a vineyard was part of the well known passage from Isaiah that was this morning's first lesson – and the Pharisees would not have missed that – they were, after all, religious

professionals.

3. From that point on, these religious leaders worked to further discredit Jesus and to have him put to death.

B. Jesus picks at the Pharisees a great deal, and because he does that, it seems that they were among the worst of the people in Israel – theirs was the party that Jesus focused so much of his attention on.

1. The Pharisees were not, however, the worst people in Israel – in fact Jesus picked at them so much because they were the closest to his beliefs among all the parties in Israel.

2. The Pharisees believed in an afterlife – even in a Resurrection of sorts – neither the Sadducees nor the Sanhedrin did. Jesus picked at them the most to try to get them to see just who he was and how important he was.

3. They did not see. Like their ancestors before them who missed the messages of the prophets and had them killed – so they were missing Jesus' message and would have him killed – it was just the way it was – just the way he told in his

story about the vineyard and the tenants.

II. It is so easy for us to read these passages and say – “Thank God we are not like that.” But we are now the Tenants of the vineyard. In fact the story has come true – the vineyard has been given over to other tenants – us.

A. Could it be that the story is now about us as well? Are we better tenants than those who came before us, or have we done pretty much the same things?

1. It is the time of the year when we get confronted with presentations about what is needed to advance the Kingdom in and through our little community here at St. John’s – and like the Pharisees in the story this morning, we do not like the confrontation any better than they did.

2. The Preacher and those responsible for stewardship in this place will attempt to convince us that it is time to return our share to the master of the vineyard – and we will not like it any better than the tenants in Jesus’ story did.

3. The Tenants did all the work, they made the vineyard productive and all the Master did was to provide the land, clear it and prepare it for them – what they

took in was theirs.

4. We do all the work, and struggle with the dangers and difficulties that life throws our way – we anticipate the downturns and make the vineyard productive – what in the world belongs to God?

B. It could be said, however, that we are even worse than the Tenants of the vineyard, for we have not actually taken very good care of what has been given to us. The massive environmental issues that are largely our fault, are an additional indication of our ingratitude and misuse of what has been given to us.

1. If we are such bad tenants, should we expect the Master of the vineyard to be patient with us and allow us to continue our bad stewardship without getting much of anything in return?

2. It is an uncomfortable feeling – isn't it? So, how seriously do we take this story, and so many others that remind us that we have been given much and that because of that, we are expected to return a fair share of what we have been given?

III. We are finding ourselves at a juncture in history and in our culture where the economy and the state of the world are leaving us with a fair amount of anxiety and when we are wondering what in the world happened to bring us here.

A. The politicians have produced a marvelous \$800 Billion rescue for the economy – we are spending Billions per month