

8th October, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can my sin erase
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Naught of works, 'tis all of grace—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Chorus

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my cleansing this I see—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
For my pardon this my plea—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

This is all my hope and peace—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
This is all my righteousness—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Chorus

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
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The Sermon by Rev. Brian Pritchard

Read Romans 2:1-11, Matthew 21:33-46: Dividing Jesus

The parable of the tenants. At face value this is an agricultural story. A vineyard is planted, the landowner rents it out to tenants. The tenants refuse to give the landowner his portion of the harvest, and beat up and murder the owner's messengers, even the owner's son. The landowner who planted the vineyard is God. The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the nation's religious leaders. The servants are the prophets whom God has sent. The landowner – God Almighty – sends his son.

Today's theme is 'Dividing Jesus' and today's Bible passage is one of three parables which focus on human responsibility in the face of divine judgment. A judgment which Paul wrote about in our reading in Romans. Is what Jesus was saying - divine judgment - just as applicable to us?

God chose Israel as his special people, gave them a wonderful vineyard to cultivate, and put his trust in his chosen people to be God's light to other nations. As we read throughout the Old Testament, we see they didn't do that. This parable points to the flagrant disloyalty of Israel's leaders, the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, who knew Jesus was talking about them.

How might this apply to us, today? Our culture tells us we don't need God, denies God in creation, seemingly claims it's all ours, anyway – what right has anyone to say anything is God's? Take a different view and we can be 'cancelled'. In today's reading in Matthew we're told that those leaders were to be held accountable – the day of reckoning is at hand. We should be disquieted by this. We, too, will be held accountable.

God, having chosen and blessed Israel, had a right to expect the people would serve him, obey his laws. God wanted a 'flagship' nation that was an example to the world – not of how they behave, but of how He behaves. Having laid down this vineyard, he has a right to expect fruit. Israel didn't do this. Instead – and this certainly challenges multiculturalism today – they mingled with the heathen and learned and followed the heathen's ways; they hardened themselves in sin and unbelief; they turned aside to idols; they despised God's Temple, and abused it; they refused to listen to the prophets; they ignored, even abused, those sent to call them to repentance; and finally, their wickedness focused on killing the Son of God – Christ the Lord.

As a nation, England, the UK, are we giving to God the fruit he expects from this part of his vineyard? With our cancel culture, the denying of even the existence of God, a total disregard for his ways and the Bible, dare we embrace

the thought that we are provoking God, as much as did his people Israel 2000 years ago? God in Christ has given us a task, in His vineyard. Are we ashamed that all around us, in many towns, and villages in this nation, are thousands, millions, who know nothing of the love, the saving grace, of God in Christ? Just 40 years after our Lord's death and resurrection, the people were chastised for their sins: Jerusalem was destroyed; the Temple was burned. In verse 43 Jesus said "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." Could this happen to us?

Yet I have hope. An expression I have used in recent months is 'God will not be mocked'. Those very words are in one commentary on this passage, looking at Israel's complacency! Our history tells of the Reformation, the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, the Revival of 1859, the Welsh Revival of 1904, the revival on the Isle of Lewis in the 1950s. Looking across to the USA there was the low-key Asbury revival earlier this year. Several speakers at New Wine this summer said a revival in this nation is overdue, and identified signs of a spiritual searching, even a turning. The negative of verse 43 is that 'the kingdom of God will be taken away from you'; the positive is that 'it will be given to a people who will produce its fruit.' To a new people who will be loyal to the vineyard owner and his son. We may look at our nation and see decline in faith, in church attendance – but across the world the church of Christ is growing. I have hope – and my prayer is that we will see that growth, that return to Christ, in this nation.

Jesus speaks of the Stone the builders rejected, and makes the link with Daniel 2 and Psalm 118. The stone the builders reject becomes the capstone; Jesus, the capstone, is the only foundation for life. To disobey his way is for us to crash against the stone, causing us pain and break our bones and have life crushed out of us.

This story tells how Jesus has come to Jerusalem to confront the tenant farmers with God's call for repentance, and with God's demand for Israel to be what it was called to be, the light to God's world. The finger pointed at the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. But this applies very much to us, today.

Dividing Jesus? Yes. We have choices. To obey him, acknowledge him, as Saviour. To strive to live as his light in the world. Or to stumble, be broken, be crushed. We must never forget that God is God, he is Almighty God, and that God will not be mocked. A salutary reminder ended one commentary on this passage: if God had been compelled to change tenants once, he could – if provoked – do it again.

We cannot be complacent – we must repent of our own failings. True repentance isn't simply saying 'sorry' – it's a turning, a striving, to live differently. History tells us revivals start with true repentance, and prayer. Will the judgments of God come down on this nation because of our unfruitfulness under so many mercies?

Collect: Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity: *Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us your gift of faith that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before, we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat & Bowls: Wed. Oct. 18th at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Oct 25th at 11am, in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.