

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 21, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 20:9-19

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone '? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. (NIV)

Think of topics that stir up controversy; issues that can get peoples emotions running high. At this time of year some of you might say Kentucky basketball or March madness can get people a little excited. I was talking with a friend about those hard to discuss things the other day and we said money, religion, and politics are often things that can make people a little uncomfortable. Theses topics, no doubt, can stir the pot and make for some heated discussion.

But nothing stirs the pot like what we are going to talk about today. Nothing creates more controversy or divides more people. In fact, nothing even comes close or ever will to raising emotions than what is under discussion this morning. For today we will be discussing the One about whom Peter declares in the Book of Acts: ***"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"*** (4). Yes, we are talking about Jesus. When it comes to Jesus, all people are either on one side or another. There is no middle ground. Jesus clearly says, ***"He who is not with me is against me"*** (Matthew 12). The reason Jesus will always be at the center of controversy is because He is the stone upon which God has chosen to build His church. He is the world's one and only Savior. Today we will consider how: **Jesus is God's chosen Stone. A Stumbling Stone to some. A Stone of Security & Salvation for others.**

Our account takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week. In three days Jesus will carry the cross up a hill just outside of Jerusalem on which He will be crucified. Tension had been building between Jesus and His enemies. Earlier, Jesus cleared the moneychangers out of the temple area. So a large group of Jewish leaders approach Jesus and question where Jesus gets such authority to teach & preach in the temple. Now, in the presence of these leaders and others: ***"He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a***

vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.” A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual or heavenly meaning. Jesus uses the picture of a vineyard. A vineyard was a very familiar thing to the people and something that many at one time or another would have even worked in. It was also a picture used in the Old Testament to describe the people of Israel. They, as a nation, were God’s vineyard. God put leaders in charge of His people - many of those leaders are standing right here before Jesus.

Listen now as Jesus’ teaches this lesson: ***“At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. ”Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' 'But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”***

Could Jesus’ have made the warning any more strong or clear? God looked for fruit in His vineyard – faith in His gracious promises and trust in His salvation and deliverance. Yet, not only did these tenants refuse to bring forth fruit, when God sent prophets with His Word look at what they did to them! The Greek words bring out very vividly their shameful, cruel treatment of God’s servants. They would beat one, literally tear the skin off of another, wound some of them severely, and send them all away empty-handed. Think of the examples of Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist.

So what would the owner of this vineyard do? Now God sent His Son. And God’s Son was standing before the very people plotting His death. Again could Jesus’ warning be any more strong or clear? What did they think they would actually achieve by getting rid of God’s Son? How foolish to think that the inheritance would be theirs if they killed the son of the owner? Jesus asks ***“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”*** Those who reject the Son, those who want Him dead will lose everything and the vineyard will be given to others.

The elders, and the teachers of the law and the chief priests all knew exactly who Jesus was talking about - He was talking about them! He was warning them. Jesus was saying that God’s kingdom would be taken from them, and all who reject Jesus and His Word, and given to others - to Gentiles. They would be punished and killed. ***“When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone '? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." "The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.”***

There is an old Jewish proverb which says: *“If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot. If the pot falls on the stone, woe to the pot. Either way, woe to the pot.”* Dear friends, Jesus is God’s chosen stone. Only in Jesus is there life. Jesus is always on the side of truth. He is the only Savior and only way to God. But so many stumble over Him. They refuse to believe that Jesus is the answer to their sin and every spiritual need.

People trip over Him and crushed by Him. It is not a good thing to be against Jesus - for everyone who does not believe will be condemned.

I pray we also take Jesus' warning to heart. For we too at times stumble over Jesus and His Word. We don't always like to hear what Jesus has to say to us - about our sin - about our helplessness - about what we truly deserve, which is punishment and death. We do not always want to give up our time to listen to Jesus or use our energy and abilities to serve Him. We too can get angry at God's messengers and mistreat them. In fact, we too were responsible for the death of God's Son; our sins killed Jesus. Our sins led us at times to stumble over this stone, which is Christ.

But while Jesus is only a stumbling stone for some, Jesus is much more to others. He is a stone of security and salvation. For ***"the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."*** The capstone is the stone that holds everything together. Jesus is the only secure foundation. He is the only hope for salvation. Salvation was secured by His perfect life - a life that Jesus willingly laid down on the cross. Jesus laid it down as the payment for sin, all sin, our sin. He took the punishment sinners deserve, and is still alive this day to tell about it. Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation upon which God's church is built. Now all who believe and are baptized are saved. All who believe are like living stones placed upon Jesus our cornerstone. In Jesus, we stand secure, all guilt is gone, all sin removed from us, a righteous that is not our own covers us, and a glorious eternal future in heaven awaits us.

Take one more look at this parable with me this morning. Certainly, we see the emphasis in Jesus' warning to his enemies. We see the harsh and foolish treatment of God's servants and Son. But, dear friends, don't you find something in here even more amazing? If you sent servants to people who mistreated them like this, would you send your son to them? If I had tenants who beat, and severely wounded, and killed my servants, there is no way I would want the son whom I love anywhere near them. This is a love beyond what I can comprehend because no way would I give up my son whom I love to be that stone. Yet, not only did God, in love, continue to send His prophets, but He send His Son whom He loved. He send Him to those who would abuse, and mistreat, and then kill Him. But God knew that would be the price of our salvation. And God's beloved Son, our Savior, willingly came and paid that awful price for us.

Now God's chosen stone is established forever. And the message of the cross will continue to stir the most controversy of all - it remains foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is still the wisdom of God to those who are being saved. The gospel is still the stench of death to some, but continues to be the pleasing aroma of life to others. Jesus was and still is a stumbling stone for many. But for you and for me I pray Jesus is so much more. May Jesus be the foundation of your faith and life. He is your Savior. He is the stone that holds everything together for us so that we will never crumble or fall. Jesus is our security and salvation. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes! Amen.

