



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
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Issue 31: Sunday 11th October 2020

*Our services today are led by members of the Gladsmuir and Longniddry Worship Team.
While Robin is on holiday this week, emergency cover is kindly
being provided by the Rev Bill Wishart (07900 367023).*

Today's reading

Mark 12: 1–12 (“The parable of the wicked tenants”)

Then he began to speak to them in parables. ‘A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” But those tenants said to one another, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture:

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes”?’

When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away. Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise (CH: 352)

The Church is wherever God's people are praising (CH: 522)

How lovely is thy dwelling place (CH: 52)

Beauty for brokenness (CH: 259)

Let all the world in every corner sing (CH: 122)

In the Name of the Father and of

This week's services are being led by our Worship Team, with a sermon written and delivered by Frances Cunningham on this week's reading from Mark's gospel:

When my daughter was born, a friend knitted some beautiful baby hats and matinee jackets for her. Sadly, they were too small for her but I loved them so kept and treasured them. After some time, a neighbour's grand-daughter was born prematurely and when she asked if she could borrow them I happily passed them on. Some months later, I asked for them back. After many requests and many replies of, "Oh yes, I must give you them", she confessed that she had sent them to a jumble sale!

Can you imagine how I felt? I had entrusted them to her and she had thrown them out! That feeling captures a small glimpse of the emotion Jesus is trying to describe in today's parable.

Jesus tells a simple story: A man has a vineyard which he decides to rent out to tenants. To prepare it for a fruitful harvest, he plants a hedge around it. To protect it from harm, he digs a place for a wine vat so the grape juice can be stored. In other words, he does everything he can to ensure a good harvest. In due course he does indeed rent it out to some tenants, presuming they'll look after it. Instead, however, they misuse his property and want to keep it for themselves. When he sends messengers to collect his rightful share of the harvest, the tenants beat them and kill them. Eventually, he sends his son and they kill him too. The landowner is furious and sets out to evict the tenants.

Jesus uses this story against the religious leaders of first century Jerusalem. We read of them in verse 12: "When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away."

These corrupt religious leaders are the tenants. As leaders of the faith, they had been entrusted with something by God. So we need to work out what it was that Jesus was really telling them, and why it was that they became so angry.

To get a sense of what is going on here in chapter 12, we have to look back a page or two to chapter 11, because there we find a clue to understanding this powerful parable. The "triumphal entry" of Mark 11:1–11 shows us Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. As we recall from the great Palm Sunday hymns, here Jesus came into the city at the start of Holy Week, with crowds shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna!", and throwing palm branches on the ground before him.

Once within the city gates, Jesus entered the Temple and saw the money changers, selling Temple currency to pilgrims. Enraged by this, he overturned their tables and chased them out. Jesus was furious with them, saying: "God said my Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations, but you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!"

You can imagine how the religious leaders must have felt as they watched this unfold in front of them. Here's Jesus, threatening the whole system of rule that they had so carefully set in place. The chief priests, scribes and elders confronted him and demanded an explanation for his actions: "What right have you to do these things? Who gave you this right?" In other words "Jesus of Nazareth: *who do you think you are???*"

So, who *is* Jesus? In today's story we find him giving his reply. And what a reply it is, tying in very neatly with that brave and uncompromising parable of the wicked tenants. Let's take a look at what it says and – more importantly – what it means.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

The vineyard is an image that runs through the whole parable and it takes us back to the promise that God made to Abraham in the book of Genesis. God promised to make Abraham the father of a great people, saying that he and his descendants must obey God. In return for this obedience, God would guide and protect them and give them the land of Israel.

The people of Israel are like a vineyard planted in the world so that they can produce the wine of God's grace, so that everyone can see who God really is. The religious leaders are the tenants, who are meant to be diligently working the field, but their lack of understanding and their selfishness lead them to turn away from the truth they were appointed to teach. Through his politically charged parable, Jesus is challenging them. Why? Because they have completely forgotten their purpose, working in tandem with the Roman authorities and actually oppressing the poor. It's a story designed to infuriate, and that is what it does.

In this reading, Jesus presents himself as a rejected stone (an illustration drawn from Psalm 118). In this way he is accusing the religious leaders of building their whole system on the wrong foundations. Jesus is not inventing a new idea. He's not starting a new religion. He's trying to remind the leaders of the Temple of what it has always been. Psalm 118 tells that the stone that the builders rejected ends up becoming the chief cornerstone. And so we see quite a turn-around taking place in Jerusalem, with a campaigning outsider stirring things up.

Now here's the heart of the matter: Jesus is accusing the leaders of bad management of God's vineyard and of distorting the worship of God in the Temple. We can see that Jesus is the vineyard owner's son who is soon to be killed. The sending of the son is the final attempt of the owner to change hearts and minds:

He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son."

But no. The religious leaders knew that Jesus had spoken the parable against them but instead of repenting before him, they plotted to murder him. By Friday he would be nailed to a cross: the one and only Son, sent out only to be rejected ... and killed.

How are we to take this parable? Only as a historic story that points to Jesus' crucifixion? Or as something that concerns us to in our own day and age?

Thinking about the lesson of the tale, perhaps we should ask ourselves what kind of wine we are producing in God's vineyard and what cornerstone are we are choosing to build our lives upon.

God has entrusted this world and this Church to us. It is up to us to show all the people the love and grace of God through us. And none of this is our own private property. We are working for God.

And what of the cornerstone? Our foundation is Jesus Christ, the *chief* cornerstone. He laid down his life for us so that we might have forgiveness and know the gracious love of God. It is up to us to recognise and to declare his right of rule over all the world. Most of all, let each one of us give ourselves to him as his humble servants, recognising our need of forgiveness and a fresh start in faith.

In company with God, we can play our small part in producing God's harvest of the vineyard: a vineyard – let's always remember – that we are only renting. Amen.

Praying for others

Generous God,
in this season of harvest
we remember the toil
of those whose harvests have failed.

We pray for those whose land or crops
have been affected by floods, drought, or fire, by pests and disease.

For those whose families are hungry
and for those who have no seed or livestock for the future.

We are thankful for all those who give to support food banks,
and we pray for those who work to fight food poverty
in our communities and across your world.

Help us to be generous givers –
of our money, food and time,
as Christian disciples in this place.

Show us how to be stewards
of the resources of your world,
for the benefit of all people.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

And finally . . .

Abigail Morrison considers choices:

This Sunday brings us our second service in Longniddry Church's building. Both Longniddry and Gladsmuir have now held their first services back in our churches since March. It has been so good to return and hear the Word of God in our lovely buildings. We can enjoy hearing our organs played and see our friends in the flesh (at least their eyes – the rest of their faces are hidden under masks). So far, the system to book in to join a service in a church has gone well. Many thanks to Norah and Peter for making this so straightforward.

But now we have another choice for worship, new to us since lock-down. Our joint Zoom services continue at 9.45am. Here you can see the whole face of friends and can join them for a chat afterwards, with a coffee. You can sing the hymns to your heart's content to Charlie's wonderful accompaniment. None of which you can do at the services in our buildings. And now it is also possible to access this service via YouTube, if you prefer.

Choices, choices! Which one is right for you? Take your pick.

I'll add a wee reminder to get going with filling shoeboxes for Blythswood Care. You can pick up a checklist from Church – pop by between 2pm and 3pm on a Tuesday when we are open for prayer or pick up one at the service in Longniddry on Sunday, but it's easiest to download the checklist from: <https://blythswood.org/shoeboxappeal-registration>

If you can't download a checklist or pick one up you can get one from Jim Couper 07796080321 (call or text him know and he'll deliver one).

Filled shoeboxes need to be taken to Jim by the end of the month (details in last week's Sunday Focus and I'll add them again in the Focus for 25th October).