

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA  
Proper 22, Year A, October 8, 2017  
The Rev. Bill Queen  
“Fruits of the Kingdom”  
Matthew 21:33-46

today is the first of our four Sundays that we will have a Parishioner Testimonial, during announcement time, about why Christ and Grace is important to them; so my sermon today and on each of these following Sundays will be intentionally brief

today’s gospel talks of a landowner who put everything in place for a prosperous vineyard; the expectation was that his tenants would tend and harvest it, keeping a portion for themselves, and returning the majority of it to the landowner; but those tenants instead tried to take over the vineyard for themselves; they refused to turn over the produce that didn’t belong to them; they mistakenly thought that they could inherit the vineyard; they misunderstand that it wasn’t and never would be theirs outright

Jesus addresses this story to the chief priests and Pharisee, but as in all his parables, he also wants us to apply this parable to our lives; in it we have a reminder that God has given us, like a complete vineyard, everything we need to live: the natural world’s air, water, sunshine, resources, food; our nation’s prosperity; our church’s location, gardens, building, and its people with gifts for ministry; and our individual lives’ health, wealth, happiness, love, and salvation; basically, all we see, all we have, and all we are is God’s; so, we cannot presume we own or are totally in charge of anything that we have been given; in all of these things, we owe most of it back to God

the parable uses the term ‘tenant’, but ‘sharecropper’ might convey the sense to us better; a sharecropper does the work, returns the bulk of produce to owner, just keeping a small portion for his own needs; we probably see our responsibility to God flip-flopped from that; we expect to keep most of our life’s ‘produce’ for ourselves while returning only a small portion to God; but we’re mistaken if we think it is mostly ours to own or to use

as a response to this understanding, we must act with great responsibility to care for all that has been given to us, yet does not belong to us: to protect and

use the natural world's resources sparingly, conserving them for future generations; to share our nation's prosperity fairly with those within our borders and to some extent even to those beyond our borders; to extend our church's ministries into ever widening circles of influence; and to use our individual lives to serve others; all of these are ways of observing God's ownership and our sharecropper status; all of these are ways to serve God

Let us pray: God, we thank you for giving us all of our great gifts, each and every day; help us to remember that every day is your harvest day and that every day is one in which we return the fruits of this wonderful and blessed kingdom back to you, their rightful owner. Amen.