

## Mark 12: 1-12

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. <sup>2</sup>When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup>But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. <sup>5</sup>Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. <sup>6</sup>He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." <sup>7</sup>But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." <sup>8</sup>So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. <sup>9</sup>What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup>Have you not read this scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; <sup>11</sup> this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? <sup>12</sup> 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.

**Meditation:** Tensions between Jesus and the religious authorities continues to intensify. Even in parabolic speech, the authorities do not mistake what Jesus is saying about them and about the inevitable outcome of this clash of values and beliefs. The parable expresses Jesus' view of what has happened and what will happen in the relationship between God and Israel. The vineyard represents Israel, the tenants represent the religious leadership, and the servants represent the Old Testament prophets in whose line Jesus sees John the Baptist and himself. And the son and heir represents Jesus. Just like they did to the prophets of old, Israel led by the religious leadership will reject Jesus. But in having rejected them and now rejecting God's own beloved, they will be rejecting none other than God from being sovereign Lord over them. In so doing, of course, they will also incur the judgement that comes as a consequence of rejection and separation from the source of all life. The parable ends with a reference to the vineyard being passed on to other tenants (the gentiles). It was important for the early church to understand this development (responsiveness of the gentiles and rejection by their own kind) in light of what Jesus himself had taught and predicted.

Is it ever too late? Decisions, choices, actions committed and then suffering the consequences? Is it ever too late? Even as parabolic speech and angry words of prophets speak of final judgement, it seems God's love for Israel is so steadfast (the attribute most common to describe God's nature in biblical Hebrew is *hesed* - steadfast love), that God will seek to find a way through the muck of suffering and disastrous consequences, even if it be a cross. Jesus proclaims the angry prophetic words, words that need to be spoken and words that need to be heard. And this time, the authorities aren't confused by the parabolic speech. They get it, even as they reject Jesus and his vision of God's will and way for them and the people. Now, they are more determined than ever to do away with him. The final showdown awaits.

In this time of Covid-19, there is a greater proclivity for anger and angry words, for decisions, choices and actions committed because we are not grounded, balanced and at our best. We feel helpless, aggravated, resentful, depressed, and it's easy to see the future in bleak terms. The people who must carry our burden are those most immediately around us. We see people making stupid decisions in parks and elsewhere jeopardizing all the hard work we're committing to for months now and it pushes us beyond the edge of tolerance. Lord, have mercy. Lord, grant us grace. Lord, open up new arteries of fresh love to flow through us, love for others which will also flow into love for ourselves. We must let go what we cannot change. And we must discern so many things we can change, beginning with ourselves. We need to get grounded again and again.

**Prayer:** Be merciful on us, O God and fill our hearts with mercy for others. Bad decisions come from places of desperation, which lead to poor judgement and impulsive words and actions. We need to get re-grounded again and again in your grace – your gift of love to us, undeserved, unmerited, abundant and free. May such grace define our way with others, even as we are filled and renewed by it ourselves again and again; Amen.