

Being Good Tenants

March 22, Lent V

Luke 19: 9-19

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Isaiah 5: 1-7

The Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Books Study has been reading [Life After Doom](#), *Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart* by Brian McLaren. It sounds like a hard, depressing read, and parts of it are but it is also very helpful for putting into perspective where we may be heading in the world, and how we might move through it faithfully, letting go of some aspects of faith, biblical interpretation, and dogma that have not been helpful, as well as seeing scripture in a new light. The book focuses on more than the climate emergency and the devastation we will face without coordinated action to mitigate the impacts. McLaren summarizes:

“Our global civilization as currently structured is unstable and unsustainable. Ecologically, our civilization sucks out too many of the Earth’s resources for the Earth to replenish, and it pumps out too much waste for the Earth to detoxify. Economically our civilizations financial systems are complex, interconnected, fragile, and deeply dependent on continual economic growth. Without continual economic growth, financial systems will stumble toward collapse. But with economic growth, we intensify and hasten ecological collapse. In addition, our global economic systems distribute more and more money and power to those who already have it, creating a small network of elites who live in luxury and share great political power, while billions live in or near poverty with little political power. Speaking of politics, as we face increasing ecological and economic instability, social unrest and conflict will also increase. As a result, our democratic political systems will be strained to or past the breaking point.”

It sounds pretty depressing and disconcerting and it is. We have not been good stewards of God’s creation and all that has been entrusted to us, the vineyard in today’s readings.

In the gospel reading today, the religious leaders have been challenging Jesus about his authority - where does his authority to do and say these things come from. In today's parable, he challenges their misuse of authority by comparing them to tenants who abuse the landowners' servants and kill his son who come to get their share of the harvest. The tenants of the time were not always treated well or fairly. They had to pay social dues or gifts, religious tithes, and taxes that could add up to 35-40 percent and only about 20% of the annual produce would be left to feed their families. So, these tenant farmers could have been frustrated, desperate and driven to violence. When the son came, they might have assumed the owner was dead and killing the son would mean they could have rights to the land. Whatever the reasons, the message is clear that violence is not the solution as Jesus names that those tenants would be destroyed and the land given to new tenants. Tenants or leaders who cling to control lose everything. Perhaps what Jesus here is naming, is that violent men, men who advocate and use violence to obtain their goals, often end up working against their own ends (the gender use here is intentional). This seems to be the kind of reality many of the world leaders are engaged in. If the vineyard is Earth, God's Creation, then we are failing at being good tenants.

According to our worship resource, *Spill the Beans*: "The parable is plainly asking the question about how God's Kingdom—God's dream for creation and will for human life, is being stolen by those who steward what is given them."

The "landowner" in the parable does everything possible to save his workers and to bring them back to a positive relationship. They scorn every attempt he makes, violently turning away from the owner's grace to the point of killing his own son. A price now must be paid. Their turning away from grace – and the positive laws of relationship – will lead to destruction. A graceful God cannot fully nullify the consequences of our behavior on body, mind, spirit, and social order. Opening to grace awakens new possibilities and energies, turning from grace limits what God can do in our lives. What are the consequences of our present realities? If we do not

care for creation, the consequences will be severe. The tenants were given several chances and each time they abused their power. We have been given many warnings and yet many leaders are still moving forward and encouraging fossil fuel use. Even as the present gulf war rages on and impacts oil prices, rather than the leaders waking up and working to develop and support the alternatives to oil, we see them continuing to push harder the use and development of fossil fuels. We are all in this together and will suffer the consequences of higher oil prices through increased cost of food and many other items, at a time when prices have already been rising.

Not all countries and leaders are hellbent on destruction, however. In spite of the failure of the last climate summit to address the need to end fossil fuels, a number of countries, led by Columbia and the Netherlands, are planning an international conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels. Columbia is hosting in the port city of Santa Marta, which plays a significant role in coal exports. Their [website](#) describes the conference “will advance international cooperation on transitioning away from fossil fuel extraction — reinforcing the objectives of the Paris Agreement and aligning with the recent Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which confirmed that States have a legal obligation to protect the climate, including by addressing fossil fuel production, licensing and subsidies.” We might ask, is the Canadian government participating? It is collective actions and taking responsibility like this that can offer a contrast and hope to the momentum towards collapse. We were also talking about this at the book study on Thursday – what can we do collectively that can make a difference. We can feel that our individual actions or changes are insignificant but if we make changes as a group, that can feel more productive and hopeful.

We are called to be good stewards of all of creation, all of life. We might ask what fruit might please God today? The Spill the Beans commentary suggests:

- Justice—standing with the poor, and the marginalised.

- Lives shaped by mercy, humility, and integrity.
- Hospitality in our churches where welcome is given without condition.
- Cultivating bold imagination with a willingness to change, to enable risk, to follow the Spirit's leading.
- Mission being our top priority and not holding onto what we have.

In the parable, Jesus condemns acting out in violence to get what we want. The underlying message is one of love and grace, as always. What would happen if we loved our enemies – if there was a true commitment to reconciliation? Can we imagine a world where we settle our differences through dialogue, consensus, and reconciliation? It **is** possible, even though we witness otherwise. We would need to repent from our present ways of operating and of the political structures that honour power over cooperation and economic structures that put profit before people. In this season of Lent, we reflect on repentance and what we need to turn away from to turn toward God, toward Jesus and his loving grace. The Bible is not good news to those in power who abuse power and oppress. Brian McLaren tells us in *Life After Doom*:

“The Bible offers little hope to the arrogant oppressors, beyond the escape clause that if they repent—if they rethink their dominating overshoot project and defect from it, if they learn to live in humble, generous harmony with one another and the Earth—they can begin again if they do so in time. In fact, that is the best framework for understanding familiar terms like “repentance” or “salvation” or “redemption” or “being born again.” These words were not intended to evoke an individual forgiveness transaction with a free trip to heaven as a bonus; instead, they issued a call for the privileged and powerful to rethink the deep and unrecognized assumptions of their civilization. They challenged colonizers to see afresh, with new eyes, eyes that have been freed from the “civilized” distortions that trained them to see certain things, miss other things, and imagine they saw things that weren’t really there. This new vision can help repentant colonizers live with a new identity in a different story than before, so the Earth

and the poor no longer groan under the marching boots of dominating civilizations.”

May we continue to open our eyes to colonization and god’s vision of redemption and freedom for all. May we continue to work to care for the vineyard, God’s creation, with love and compassion, resisting violence that destroys others and ourselves. May we work collectively to live differently to restore hope and grace in the world. May we know that God is with us as we witness leaders who refuse to repent and may we turn from violent and destructive ways. May God’s love give us strength to stand together and move forward even in the midst of doom.