

The 5th Sunday in Lent  
“Not Empty Handed!”

Luke 20:10-12

April 6, 2025

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 5th Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading, Luke 20:10-12

**“10 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out.**

Put yourself in the owner’s shoes. You be the owner. Would you have done what the owner did? Would you have sent a third servant to receive some of the fruit of the vineyard after the first two were beaten? What would you have done after the 2<sup>nd</sup> servant came back empty handed and beaten.

Some people live by the superstition that the 3<sup>rd</sup> time is the charm. After two unsuccessful attempts, the 3<sup>rd</sup> time is bound to succeed! Or some people believe that bad things come in three’s. But there are no such things as superstitions. God’s Word tells us that unrepentant hearts continue to do evil a 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> time without end. Unrepentant hearts will only grow in seeking and inventing more ways to do evil!

That’s exactly what happens in the parable that Jesus continued to tell. For the Father then sent a 4<sup>th</sup> emissary. Listen to what happens next:

**13 “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.’ 14 But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’ 15 So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.” And when they heard it they said, “Certainly not!”**

Would you as the owner of the vineyard have done that? Would you purposely put your beloved son in harm's way, giving the vinedressers one more opportunity to do their duty, after seeing what they did to the first three servants?

I think it would be difficult to find a "yes" answer among us. But that is exactly what the owner of the vineyard did. And it becomes very clear, now, that Jesus is speaking of Himself – the Son of God!

So Peter, says in **Acts 2:23**, what those lawless hands did.

**Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;**

What does this story quickly tell us? That God is very patient. God is long-suffering and wants everyone to repent of one's sins and show forth fruits of faith in Jesus! Not empty hands!

**Romans 10:21 But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."**

And as 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us:

**9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."**

God wants us, the workers in His vineyard, to love His Son as He is loved by the Father and faithfully serve Him our entire lives – harvest after harvest – bringing forth full hands of the good fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

God doesn't want to destroy the vinedressers. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And yet, God is also just and must punish evil. In fact, in our parallel Gospel readings in Matthew 21, when Jesus asks the question, "What will the owner do?" The Chief Priests and elders answer:

**“41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”**

Yes, Jesus affirms their answer for the justice of God must be carried out and is plain to all.

**“6 He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.”**

So Jesus quotes Psalm 118 to tell them exactly what God is doing.

**The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.**

**23 This was the Lord’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.**

We see that this was not insanity on God’s part, but His carefully formulated plan to save the world. This was the Lord’s doing! God had to send His Son to His chosen people even after they beat and killed the prophets. It was the only way to save them. It was the only way to save us Gentiles also, empty handed and evil people that we are.

Jesus was rejected. He is speaking these words to the Jewish leaders on Holy Tuesday and three days later the stone was rejected on the cross of Calvary. But, by Jesus death and resurrection, He became the Chief Cornerstone. Listen to what the Lord’s hands have done in Psalm 118!

**“The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.**

**15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation Is in the tents of the righteous;**

**The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted;**

**The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 17 I shall not die, but live,**

The Lord does not come to us with empty hands, but offers up His beloved Son to die for us! God’s hands are fully of mercy! For all people, Gentiles included. So we praise God for what His hands have done as Psalm 118 continues.

**24 This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.**

And in two weeks we will gather at our Easter sunrise service on the basketball court and sing together Psalm 95 in our Matins service. It’s called the Venite, which means “come” in Latin.

We come to worship God and praise Him for what His hands have accomplished for our salvation in Jesus!

**“5 The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land.**

**6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.**

**7 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.**

So, Hebrews 2 again tells us of God’s masterful plan for our salvation.

**“What is man that You are mindful of him,**

**Or the son of man that You take care of him?**

**7 You have made him a little lower than the angels;**

**You have crowned him with glory and honor,**

**And set him over the works of Your hands.**

**8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”**

For into the Father’s hands, the Son commended His Spirit having paid for all the evil works of evil hands. And now the mighty hands of God have exalted Jesus above all things and He reigns at the Father’s right hand with all power according to His human nature.

For those who continue to reject Jesus, who think they can keep the inheritance on their own terms of self righteousness, their empty hands will result in their eternal punishment.

**“18 Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”**

May this never be for anyone who hears God’s Word of salvation in Jesus, the Chief Cornerstone. But with repentant hearts may each of us receive God’s complete forgiveness in His Word and Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And know that good does come in three’s – the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit – God’s mercy and love comes to us over and over again without limit.

Psalm 145 tells us of God's full hands of love.

**“16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.**

**17 The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works.**

**18 The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.**

**19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.**

Having filled our hearts and hands with His great love in Jesus, come to Him with hands full of His praise and love and offer to Him our gifts of service...to the God of our salvation! Amen

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**