

Proper 22, Year A

October 4, 2026

Isaiah 5:1-7 / Psalm 80:7-14 / Philippians 3:4b-14 / Matthew 21:33-46

**GOD
IS...**



0

So? How did you do on your homework?



1

Last week I sent you out with one assignment.
Give someone else a do-over.

Show of hands... Who managed it?

Show of hands... Who meant to?

Who thought about it on Monday,
got cut off in traffic on Tuesday,
and by Wednesday decided
that person didn't really deserve a do-over anyway?

I'll tell you, I tried.
 And it was harder than I thought.
 Not because I didn't know who needed a do-over from me.
 Because I *most definitely* did!

Look... It's easy to give a do-over to someone you like.
 The *homework* is giving one to a person *we'd rather not*.

So... here's the good news.
 This Sunday... *everybody* gets another do-over.

The noun... and the verb

Including me.

Now, I'm guessing the last thing you expected this morning
 was another parable about a vineyard.



2

Three Sundays in a row.
 First, the workers who showed up at five o'clock
 and got paid the same as everybody else.
 Then the two sons.
 One said no and went.
 One said yes and didn't.
 And now... *the tenants*.

And ***not just*** in our Gospel.
 Isaiah sang us ***a love song*** about a *vineyard*.
 The psalm ***prayed over a vine***.

***“Alright, Lord, we get it.
 Vineyards.
 Can we move on?”***

It seems like... ***God’s*** not done with it.

Or with us.



3

That’s the thing about vineyards.
 You don’t plant one and walk away.
 You come back.
 Season after season.
 You prune. You tend. You wait.
 You keep hoping for fruit.
 God keeps coming back to the vineyard
 because God keeps coming back to us.
 Which brings me to a story.



4

There's a fable about the Angel Gabriel who had just come from surveying the earth and its inhabitants when he reported to God.

“Lord, it’s my duty to inform you that you’re the possessor of a choice piece of real estate known as planet earth.

But the tenants you’ve leased it out to are destroying it. In another few years, it won’t be fit to live in.

They have polluted your rivers.

The air is fouled with the stench of their over-consumerism.

They frequently kill one another, and all the prophets you’ve sent to them calling for an accounting have met with violence.

By any rule of sound management, Lord, you’ve got but one option.”

Then raising his trumpet to his lips, Gabriel asked,
“Shall I sound the eviction notice now, sir?”

And God said,

“No, Gabriel! No, not just yet.

I know you are right, but I keep thinking if I just give them a little more time they’ll quit acting like they own the place!”

5



It's no accident that this story lands today.
 October fourth is the feast of Saint Francis.
 The little poor man of Assisi
 who called the sun his brother
 and the moon his sister,
 who preached to the birds
 and made peace with a wolf.

Francis gave away everything he owned.
 Not because he hated the world,
 but because he loved it too much to grab it.
 He understood what the tenants never did.
 The earth is not ours to use up.
 It's ours to tend.

***Every river, every field, every creature
 belongs to the One who made it.***

6



*The vineyard doesn't belong to the tenants.
The vineyard belongs to the landowner.*

That's the whole mistake in Matthew's parable.

The tenants didn't fail to work.
The vines grew. The harvest came.
Their sin... *they wanted to keep it.*

"This is the heir!

Come... let us kill him... and get his inheritance."

They forgot whose vineyard it was.

Isaiah saw the same thing seven hundred years earlier.
And he tells it with a play on words... that gets lost in English.

God looked for justice. In Hebrew, mishpat.
And God found bloodshed. Mispach.

God looked for righteousness. Tsedaqah.
And God heard a cry. Tse'aqah.

Say them out loud, and they almost sound the same.
Mishpat. Mispach. Tsedaqah. Tse'aqah.

That's the danger. Fruit that *sounds right... but isn't.*

Religion that looks good from the road...
but goes sour on the vine.

That's what grows
when we forget *whose* vineyard... *it actually is.*

In other words...
 everything we have... everything that we create...
 every piece of fruit that we bring to fullness...
 belongs to God.

It is not ours... It is God's.

Shortly after I was called to my first call as a rector,
 my wife Kate and I had dinner with the former rector,
 Father Richard, and his wife Judy.

I hoped he would offer some special insight about the people there.
 Something about how things work.
 Something he gained from his thirty-one years as rector.

He gave me just one directive. Only one.



7

Never forget.
This is not your church.
This is God's church.

I'll be honest.
 At first... I heard that *as a warning.*
Don't get too big for your collar.

But over the years...

*I've come to hear it as the most freeing thing
anyone has ever told me.*

Because if it's *not* my church,
then *I* don't have to *hold it all up*.

I don't have *to save it*.

I don't have *to guard it like a watchtower*.

I only have *to tend it*.

And give back the fruit.

That's true for every one of us.

Tending looks like the *altar guild*
setting the table before anyone arrives.

It looks like *the reader* who *practices the lesson at home*.

The person who notices a new face

Helps them find a seat... and sits with them.

The one *who calls...*

when someone's been missing for a few Sundays.

None of that makes headlines.

None of it gets a plaque.

But *that* is what a *good tenant* looks like.

Not owning the vineyard.

Tending it.



Now, maybe you've seen one of these videos on Social Media.

Some clergyperson is asked if it's true...

Will God provide if I give God everything?

"That's what the bible says..."

And they recite the verse...

So the person gives all their money to the church

A couple months later, a lawyer contacts them

You are the only heirs of a relative you never knew.

You are in his will. You are now quite wealthy.

A nice story...

But it is ***not the gospel.***

Because it turns giving... into an investment.

And God's vineyard

Is not a place to get rich... and move on...

It's a place to belong.

It's a place to be grounded in love... not fear...

***It's a place to be blessed... in ways even great wealth
can never provide.***



Another story.

There's a village in the mountains of Italy
where people grow grapes.

Every family had their own way of making wine...
And each year they would bring their wine to the center of town
and pour it into one great keg.

And here's what I love about that village.
Every family's wine was different.
Different grapes. Different methods. Different vintner's secrets.



10

That's what made the little village's wine...
...one of the finest in the world
It wasn't that everybody's was the same.
It was that everybody's *was there*.
A cacophony of blended fragrances
Fruity, herbal, floral, nutty, tobacco, leather. oaky,
Complexity of aromas, flavors and nuances
Are indicators of truly fine wines...

But one year the weather was bad and the harvest was small.
Since things would be tight... one winemaker sold his wine elsewhere,
filled his barrel with water, and poured it into the town keg.
One barrel of water in that great keg.
How could it make a difference?
The wine aged for seven years.

When the time came, the whole village gathered
as wine merchants from all over the world waited to taste it.
Everyone depended on that sale to carry them to the next season.

They tapped the keg. A pitcher was placed beneath it.
And out came... *nothing but water.*



11

It seemed everyone in the village had the same idea.
“*One barrel won’t make a difference.*”
No one put in their wine. And so... there was no wine.
The keg only ever holds... what we pour into it.



12

So what about the tenants *in Matthew’s vineyard?*
What if they *had* given the owner *his share* of the harvest...
What if they *had welcomed* the servants...
What if they *had honored* the son...
Would things have turned out differently?

Of course they would have. There was *plenty for everyone*.
 There *always was*. The vineyard was *never the problem*.
 The **grabbing** was.

And look *how patient* the **owner** is.
 He sends *servants*. They're *beaten*.
 He sends *more*. **Same thing**.
Any landlord in Port St. Lucie
would have called the sheriff after the first round.

But this owner *keeps* sending. *Keeps* hoping.
Keeps giving the tenants *one more chance* to do the *right* thing.

That's not weakness.... That's love.



13

It's the same love *Gabriel couldn't understand*. Not just yet.
 And notice who pronounces the death sentence in the parable.
Not Jesus.

The listeners.

"He will put those wretches to a miserable death."

We are always quicker to sound the eviction notice...
...than God is.

14



Jesus answers... *with a stone.*
 The one *the builders threw away.*
 “The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.”

That’s how God’s house works.
 The one they *rejected...*
 ends up ***holding the whole thing together.***
 In *God’s vineyard,*
 There is *always room for one more.*

15



When we remember... *it’s God’s house...*
we stop guarding the door
 and... ***start opening*** it.
We stop counting the chairs
 and ***start pulling up more.***

The *tenants* locked the gate.
God keeps building a bigger table.



16

Paul knew it.

He had *every reason* to think ***he owned something.***

Pedigree. Law. Zeal. A spotless record.

And he counts it all... ***as loss.***

Not because it was bad... but because

none of it was his to hold.

“Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

We are not the owners. We are the owned.

The Beloved. The Claimed.

Planted by God’s own right hand.

And Paul says,

“Not that I have already reached the goal... but I press on.”

Paul wasn’t done either. ***Neither are we.***

And just listen to how he does it.

By ***“Forgetting what lies behind***

and straining forward to what lies ahead.”

Forgetting what lies behind.

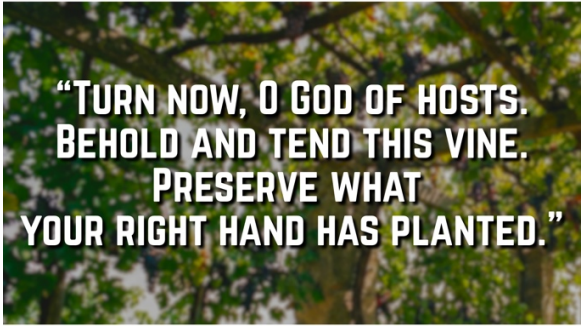
That’s a do-over.

Paul gave himself one.

The persecutor became the apostle.

The one who held the coats while they threw stones...

built on the cornerstone.



**"TURN NOW, O GOD OF HOSTS.
BEHOLD AND TEND THIS VINE.
PRESERVE WHAT
YOUR RIGHT HAND HAS PLANTED."**

17

So maybe the prayer for this week
is the one we said together in the psalm.

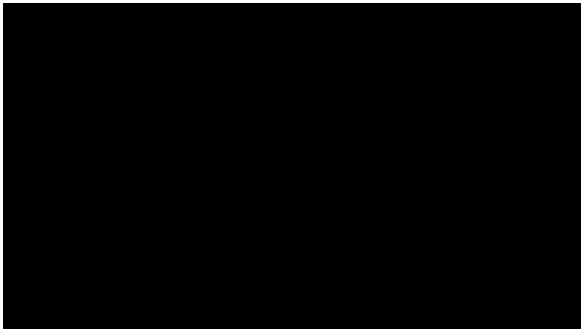
"Turn now, O God of hosts.

Behold and tend this vine.

Preserve what your right hand has planted."

That's the tenants' prayer
once they finally remember
whose vineyard it is.

18



[spoken, in silence]

The story isn't finished.

The harvest isn't in.

God is not done with the vineyard.

And God is not done with us.

NOT.
JUST.
YET.

19

Not.
Just.
Yet.

GOD
IS...

...Just
Getting
started

20

START LYRIC VIDEO

WORDS SPOKEN OVER THE INTRO

Isaiah opened this morning with a love song.
“Let me sing for my beloved...”

Well, here’s one more.
Some of you know this tune.
This morning it belongs to the vineyard.

Because God isn’t finished.
God isn’t tired... ***God’s just getting started.***