

Don't lose the plot of the Story

27th Sunday Ordinary Time
October 7th and 8th 2023

Today we have one of the most challenging of all Jesus' parables. He uses the most extreme language to make a crucial point.

Don't lose the plot of the story of God's saving love.

What Jesus is highlighting in this parable is the regularity with which we do just that, lose the plot of the story.

This tendency to lose the plot goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 3. Here we are told of the temptation the devil directed towards the man and the woman. This temptation was to place themselves at the centre of the story and to thereby sideline God. You can be like God, so who needs God. In one form or another when this happens, we lose the plot of the story, a point of emphasis that reaches a climax in today's parable.

What makes this parable so startling is the audience. Jesus is addressing this vineyard tale to those who above all others should have known the plot of the God story. He is talking to the priests and religious leaders of Judaism. What startles us when we read the story is how often those people who are called God's special people forget the God who has called them and entrusted to vineyard to them. They think, it is ours to do with as we please. And so, Jesus tells of slaves sent to collect the produce that rightfully belongs to the vineyard owner. But one they kill and the other they stone. This is probably a reference to the prophet Isaiah who was sawn in two by the wicked King Manasseh. Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt. Then we get to the heart of the story – which, as always happens in the parables of Jesus, there is the twist.

What is the twist here? That somehow these evil tenants will respect the owner's son! How crazy is this. They didn't respect the owner's slaves when they went to collect – so what makes dad think they will respect my boy? And that is the point. They have so lost sight of the plot line of God's story that they will seize and kill the central character. The stone which the builder's rejected will become the very corner stone of the story that can, in the end, never be silenced. This is what Jesus is getting at here. Regardless of how often – even those who have been entrusted with the story, lose the plot line, the story of God's love will never be lost and forgotten.

Why is that? Because God is the one who even out of great confusion and our forgetfulness is able to raise up those who remember that the Lord created a beautiful vineyard that is poetically expressed this way by Isaiah:

***Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.***

² ***He dug it and cleared it of stones,***

*and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes¹*

Who is the singer of this love song? It is Isaiah, the prophet sawn in two. Who is his beloved? God. And the beautiful vineyard? It is the Church. But as was true in the time of Isaiah, and with Jesus, we too can lose the plot of the story. The Church can, and has often forgotten to whom the vineyard belongs. The grapes are to represent the lives of those who are discovering the gift of living out the story of God's grace-filled and redeeming love. Grapes in the bible represent life, vitality and are of course the basis of wine. When we remember the plot of the story there is a richness to life!

But when we forget the beauty of the vineyard and the one to whom it belongs, great harm and damage can be done to those who make up the vineyard - that is the Church of God. God is always calling us therefore to remember the story so that the Church can be restored. I like that word "restored", it could perhaps be expressed this way: "re-storied" Now I know I have made up a word but something that is being restored, is like well, hearing the story again so that we can reclaim the one who is at the centre, Jesus Christ.

Last Wednesday was the Feast of St Francis. In the late 11th and early 12th century he heard the call of God on his life, Jesus wanted him to restore the Church. He was to be a troubadour who sang once more the story of God's amazing love. So captivated was St Francis by this call on his life, that he gave his all for the restoration and renewal of the Church. His vision was so captivating to others many followed and said we want to be part of this re-storied Church.

It was on October 4th that here in the Diocese of Calgary we had announced the beginning of a four year season of Pastoral Renewal. During this time, we want to discover that we are part of a great story, whose plot we want to remember so as to find ourselves caught up and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do in our day what St Francis did in his day.

Such a vision of what can be possible when we set our hearts and minds on Jesus is to be a community where we discover Jesus speaking to each of us personally:

"you are called, you matter, you belong".

To be called, is to discern the voice of Jesus saying to each of us: "I invite you to rise to the challenge to reclaim the story of my great love in your time. As you do so you will discover more fully that you truly matter to me. Through you I want you to create communities of belonging".

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Is 5:1–2). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Such a vision can call us to form an outlook where we can affirm that yes, we are part of a story that can honestly acknowledge the past and the ways we had lost the plot line – but we can also look forward hopefully and with renewed purpose as we respond to the invitation the Bishop issued to us today and is reinforced by what we will now watch.