



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 26, 2014

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Matthew 21:33-43

GOD'S CRAZY COMMITMENT, HIS INCOMPREHENSIBLE LOVE!



How many times in your life of faith do you say to yourself, "God's will be done, but I just feel like his will is so different from my will!" We wonder this as believers, don't we? Every one of us understands that God's will is always done, and sometimes it's even done whether I like it or not. But often times, as faithful believers, we don't quite understand

his will and his purpose. We seek to understand. We look forward to understanding fully in heaven. We try to figure it out sometimes as we look for a possible reason why God acts this way or that way in my life. But we don't always fully grasp it.

To put it a different way, the prophet Isaiah says in 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD." God acts in a different way than we would.

We have a very clear example of that in Jesus' parable this morning. Jesus is talking here to Pharisees, to unbelievers whose parents had rejected prophet after prophet for hundreds of years. Most of the Pharisees Jesus addresses here, if not all of them, had also rejected those same prophets as prophesying about Jesus himself. Now God had sent his own Son to them, hoping that they would listen to the heir, but yet again these tenants of the vineyard were in danger of killing the heir to the vineyard too. Yet God is still reaching out to them, and in such an illogical way.

Let me show you in the parable. "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some

farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third." Can you believe these tenants? What a bunch of wicked people! It's no wonder the Pharisees to whom Jesus is talking condemn the tenants at the end of the text as being wretches! What should the landowner do? You could probably think of many things that he would do at this point. He should take the land away! He should throw the tenants in prison! He should come after them with the authorities! Who of us, if we were the landowner, would think, "Oh, I know! I should send more servants!" That's the last thing we would think to do, isn't it?!

But God's ways are not our ways. "Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way." Well is there any surprise? By now, the landowner would have certainly learned not to send anyone else, right? He should just get rid of those wicked tenants! But here's the real twist of the story. Who of us, if we were the landowner, would think, "Well, I should send my son to these wicked tenants!" The person that the landowner holds most dear, the heir, is sent last of all. What love! What high expectations the landowner had for these wicked tenants who have proven their unworthiness to even stand in the presence of the son, the heir! "Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."

The landowner should have known what these wicked tenants were going to do to his son. And you know the real crazy part of the parable, the part that we're not specifically told in this parable? God, of course, *did* know that they would kill his Son. Yet he sent him anyway. That's God's love! That's his crazy commitment, his incomprehensible love, that is so strong to save, that wants nothing less than the full and

free salvation of the whole world, even of those wicked tenants who killed the Son! That's why he sends his Son in the first place.

That's a pretty crazy love for wicked people, isn't it? Does God have any less love for us? There's a sinful nature in all of us that wants nothing to do with God's servants, the prophets, or with his Son, the Christ. There's a sinful nature in all of us that has beaten, killed, and stoned the prophets and the Son in God's Word every time we neglect that Word of God. And oh how often we have followed that sinful nature in neglecting the word of the servants and the Son! What do we deserve for this neglect, for this abuse, for this wickedness? Ask those wicked Pharisees, they'll tell you the same thing that our own conscience tells us when we are presented with such wickedness. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'" That's how we think, isn't it? Those are our ways, aren't they? The Pharisees give the same answer that we would give. That's what the Pharisees deserved! That's exactly what we deserve too! We deserve to have the Word, the servants and the Son, ripped from us completely, taken away forever, and given to someone who will treat it properly!

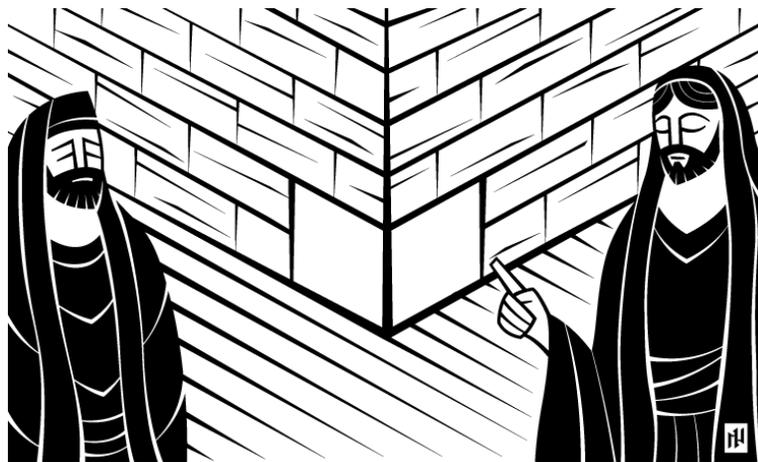
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD." God acts in a different way than we would. God's love is so strong to save that he would stop at nothing to make us his own, no matter how crazy or incomprehensible. God's love is so strong to save that he would willingly give up his one and only Son, the heir to all things, and send him here to earth to live perfectly, proclaim a message to unfaithful tenants, and to be beaten, killed, even crucified. Fully knowing all of this, God willingly sent his Son anyway. He continued to proclaim this message of his love again and again and again. He faithfully proclaimed it through servants, through prophets, through kings, through judges, through disciples, through apostles, through evangelists, even through his one and only Son. What persistence on the part of our loving God!

And what was the result of all of this faithful proclamation of his crazy commitment and his incomprehensible love? The faithful remnant believed

the Lord. God's message is still proclaimed through his faithful servants today, and it still today works faith in you, his faithful people. Jesus cites one of those faithful prophecies at the end of the parable from Psalm 118:22, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes." We sang part of this Psalm earlier in the service; it's a famous resurrection Psalm. "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!' I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.... The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

What great thing has the Lord done for us? He has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the cornerstone of our faith. Jesus died on the cross, but that was not the end for him! Jesus was raised to life by God the Father on the third day, and because he lives, we too will live! Who of us would have ever come up with such a ludicrous plan, yet such a wonderful plan that assures our complete salvation and our resurrection from the dead! So strong is God's love to save us! This is marvelous in our eyes! This is God's crazy commitment and his unfailing, incomprehensible love.

Do you want another example of how committed God is to saving his people? Take the Old Testament lesson as an example. We heard an example of those Old Testament people who rejected the servants that the landowner sent. God sent prophets to his people to call them to repentance, but did they listen? They didn't, 2 Kings says. King Manasseh was one of the worst kings Judah ever had. You heard his unfaithfulness. He set up shrines to false gods. He set up the high places, altars to foreign gods that the people were not supposed to go to. He even set up these shrines and altars in the very temple of the one true God in Jerusalem! And if this wasn't bad enough, Manasseh sacrificed his own child to a false god. Manasseh participated in just about every worship act of the false gods around him, of the people who lived in the land before the Israelites, even though he knew the truth. Yet here's God's crazy commitment and incomprehensible love. Did you know that he called



Manasseh to repentance by taking him into exile? And Manasseh, in his humility, repented and humbled himself before God. And what did God do to him? We know what he should have done. We know what we would have done. But God's ways are not our ways. God was moved by Manasseh's humility, we're told in 2 Chronicles 33. God brought Manasseh back from exile, set him back up as king over Judah, and Manasseh got rid of the shrines and altars to the false gods, cleansed the temple, and restored worship to the one true God. Talk about crazy commitment!

Has God shown any less love to you and to me? He does the same thing for us. He loves us in a way that sometimes we can't even comprehend. He loves us so much that he sends to us Jesus, his Son the heir, who has made us heirs of his Kingdom.

There will still be times in our lives when we don't fully understand what God's will or purpose is in allowing things to happen to us. There will be times in our lives when we wonder why God's ways are not our ways. But one thing we will always know for certain: God loves us more than we can ever possibly imagine. Just look at his Son, the heir, who made you a son and an heir too. Amen.

