

5th Sunday in Lent
Pastor Matthew Ude
April 7th 2018

²² Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (Lam. 3:22-23 NKJ)

Every morning with the raising of the sun also comes another day of God's forgiveness love and mercy. But what will happen on the day when God's love does not rise?

I remember reading a science fiction story once where the sun was gone. No more day, no more heat. Hour by hour the earth was getting colder and colder. The warmth that it once had escaping into space. The people in the story were seeking a place that was still warm. And at the end of the story they found it, but for how long?

How long will we last when the warmth and light of God's grace is removed from our lives?

That is what happened to King Saul. The Lord with endless patience tried to call Saul to repentance over and over but Saul would not listen until finally the Lord's grace and love was removed from Saul. And how miserable and terrible was Saul's life from then on. He was filled with anger and loathing and trouble.

This is what we find in our text today. A God whose love is far more patient than anything we could possibly imagine, and yet is not endless. And woe to us if God's grace is taken from us.

Luke 20:9-13 ⁹ Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. 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. 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.'

There are times when Jesus uses very common sense parables. Stories that are a normal part of our life. Like for example the parable of the *Sower and the Seed*. Then there are parables like this one or the one from last Sunday which are simply absurd, they are ridiculous in the extreme. Yet the more absurd the parable, the closer we come to God.

⁸ "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. ⁹ "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8-9 NKJ)

What man would do this? Many of you are land owners? How many servants would you send before you came and destroyed these wicked workers? Yet God's love is so absurdly extravagant that that he sends servant after servant. Luke only mentions three, but in Matthew and Mark there are many more.

Finally his love is so great that he even sends his own son. He knows that they will probably kill him, but his love for them is great enough that He is willing to risk it in the hope that they will repent.

Luke 20:14-16 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!"

On Tuesday I was working on this text. The first thing you do is you read the text in the Greek. So I'm reading the text in the Greek. And I come to the end of verse 16, and there in the Greek it says, "mae genoito." And without even really thinking about it I translate in my head, "It shall not be" or "certainly not." And then I stopped and looked at it again and I thought that can't be right. I must be missing something. Who hearing this parable would object to the master coming and destroying those wicked servants. So I look at the Greek again, and I get out the English bible, and sure enough, the people listening to that parable had the audacity to say, "certainly not."

In this they mimic the wicked workers in the parable. For they also were foolish enough to think that there is no way that God would punish them. They think they can get away even with killing His own Son.

Why would anyone think they can get away with this? Is it not because God's love is so great so patient that we also take it for granted? Like the raising of the sun we think it will always be there.

So think the wicked servants. The greater God's patience, the more brazen they become in their sin.

So the people of Israel. They are so used to God's seemingly endless patience that they cannot believe it will come to an end. For it is clear that they know exactly what Jesus is suggesting to them. They know that Jesus is telling them that He will come and take away the nation of Israel. Yet God has forgiven them so many times in the past, that they cannot believe that His patience is actually at an end.

In many ways this parable is a lot like the one we had last week. It shows us God's people wasting God's grace in sin. It shows a father always seeking the lost ones, constantly calling them to repentance. It shows a God with an absurd amount of love. But in this it differs that it shows us a God who will in the end remove His grace.

So what about us?

You know this is what the Catholics accused Luther of. They said to him if you only preach God's love, if you teach that salvation is by grace alone, then people will live in sin because why do they need to stop if God's love is endless. Luther knew that there was some truth to what they said. But he also knew that this is who our God is. To those who delight in sin this is a weakness that they can exploit. But to Luther who knew his own sin so well it was "Love Unknown" in which he delighted.

So what about us? We who have inherited this daily renewal of God's grace. Is this to us an excuse to live in sin, or an opportunity to confess our sins and rejoice in our Savior. What sins do you have today that you keep holding on to because we think, "well God will forgive me."

Luke 10:17-20 ¹⁷ Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone ' ? ¹⁸ "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." ¹⁹ And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people-- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them. ²⁰ So they watched *Him*, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.

What happens if you drop a pot on a stone? What happens if you drop a stone on a pot? Either way the stone wins. I think that is Jesus' point here.

They rejected him but God choose him. You can't win against God. If you don't kill me I will bring judgment on you. I you do kill me God will bring judgment against you. Either way you lose.

Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, ³ "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." ⁴ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. (Ps. 2:1-4 NKJ)

Do not mistake God's patience for weakness. Do not think that because He is long suffering you can escape His judgment forever.

I met a pastor the other day who was telling me how he asked his congregation three questions and he had them raise their hands. I won't make you raise your hands cause I know Lutherans don't do that, but you can in your head. So the first was, "did Jesus die for everyone?" Almost everyone raised their hands. The second was, "Does God love everyone?" Most people raised their hands. Then "Are there people whom God loves who are going to go to hell?" Three people raised their hands. I hope there are more than three of you with your hands up.

Most people go along with the Scribes and chief priests, certainly not. Certainly God will not destroy us forever. Most people think, "God loves everyone, certainly he is not going to send judgement." But our parable today shows us something different.

God indeed loves all. He wants all to be saved. His love is great enough to send His only Son to die for our sins. His judgment is coming. Yet we who stand in Christ need not fear this judgment, for we have His grace and have been washed in the blood of Christ.

Amen