

16 Pentecost: Stewards and Cornerstones

[Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20](#); [Psalm 19](#); [Philippians 3:4b-14](#); [Matthew 21:33-46](#)

October 2, 2011

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In our psalm for today we find these beautiful words: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another. Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard, their sound has gone out into all the lands, and their message to the ends of the world.”

In the first chapter of Genesis we read how, in the course of six days and nights, God created light and separated it from the darkness, he separated the land from the primordial waters, he let the day and the night be signs for the seasons and the years, and he brought swarms of creatures from the depths of the waters to crawl and walk on dry land and fly in the air. Finally, God declared his creation to be good.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

And on the seventh day, God completed the cycle of creation and he rested leaving humanity in charge of the creation that came from the depths of divine wisdom and he declared it to be very good.

But the first son of man, Cain, grew jealous and angry, and killed the second son of man, Abel. And a vicious cycle had begun.

In our parable from the gospel for today, Jesus tells a parable of a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard improved his property by digging a winepress and building a watchtower and left this valuable land in the care of tenants. Then, when it came time for the harvest, round about this time of year, he sent some of his slaves to collect the produce. But the tenants set upon them, beat and killed them. He then sent more slaves, but they were treated the same way. Finally he sent his own son, thinking the tenants would respect his own flesh and blood. But they were greedy for the inheritance of the son of their lord, and plotted and killed him too.

What a world these people live in? The tenants, those given the land temporarily to care for it and pass it on, have usurped ownership, mistaken dominion for lordship, and abused and killed those representatives the owner sent to collect the produce?

Sadly, this is our world, and we are the tenants. We are the sons and daughters of humankind. We need to take a good look at ourselves. How do we live our lives, day to day, month to month, year to year? Do we look upon the rivers and streams, the hills and

mountains, the trees and the fields and wonder in awe at their beauty, as reflections of the wisdom and goodness of the creator? Do we think of the Grand Canyon and think “creek”? Do we wonder at the vastness of the oceans teeming with life, large and small, and think “aquarium”? Are we so provincial that we cannot imagine Lewis and Clark beholding the great plains or the rocky mountains for the first time void of wonder? Have we forgotten the wisdom of untouched wilderness, pure streams with silver trout flashing, high mountains where cougar and bear roam unmolested, and deer stir at the slightest foreign scent on the breeze? Do we know the sound of the wind stirring the tops of three thousand year old redwoods or air and water flying as a great blue whale surfaces and gleams in the sun?

When we behold the vast, richness of nature, we behold God’s gift to us. Whether we see resources and personal riches or wisdom and beauty, it is the Word that sounds in all creation. We may be deaf to the symphony in and behind creation, but there, outside our door, in the blue sky and the very land beneath our feet is the Word made flesh. Instead we may only hear a truck and its Jake brakes, we may only see concrete and smell exhaust, but know, that if we had ears to hear, the Christ is there, the cornerstone of creation.

Jesus was sent, the son of the lord of the vineyard, but the tenants killed him. Yet he rose again and abides still as the Word through whom all was made. We kill him still when we destroy mountains to mine for coal, when our oil spills spew deadly slicks into our oceans, and even when we speak ill of neighbors, our brothers and sisters.

We come here, to this house of God, to strengthen our relationship with God and his Son. We come to learn faith. We come to make Christ the cornerstone of our lives. This is no easy task. Yes, sitting in the pew and joining in worship may not be so difficult. But we bring the world with us, we bring our selfishness, our greed, our jealousy; our egos are not always checked at the door like coats to be collected later.

Nevertheless, we are accepted, we are loved. All are welcome at Christ’s table in this place. All, by partaking of the bread and the wine in remembrance of him, are knit into the Body of Christ. And then when we turn back around and go out into the world, we bring a new perspective with us. We may have to swim against the current like a salmon battling rapids to return to its origins. But we gain something from his table: call it an inkling. We learn that, no matter how small or fragile we may be, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We are friends of Christ. And in order to be true to this friendship, we must buck the tide of greed and possessiveness holding sway in our world. Christ has sparked, maybe even ignited, within us the flame of love, love for our neighbors, love even for our enemies, compassion for the sick, the homeless, the suffering even our midst, love for the earth and all her creatures, a new caring even for our selves, our souls.

Let us pray that we may accept the love of Christ here, today, and become ever more a part of his mystical Body through his loving embrace. Otherwise, like the Israelites, we will meet instead God’s power face to face and be compelled to follow his commandments as a result of fear not love, trembling not hope. Either way, we will grow into stewards who care, who no longer usurp the vineyard, but love and serve all of God’s creation. In this way Christ becomes the cornerstone of our lives. Amen.