

“If He Were My Son, He Would Respect Me” Pastor Marie Tone

Jeremiah 7:21–26、 Mark 12:1–12

1) The Parable of the Vineyard Owner and the Farmers

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of “the vineyard and the farmers.” These words were spoken to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. At that time, the way Jesus bore witness to God had a profound impact on those around him. For those who believed in Jesus' words and followed Him, this influence was positive, moving their hearts to turn toward God. On the other hand, for the chief priests, scribes, and elders—that is, those in positions of social authority—it threatened their standing and stirred up anxiety. They took a hostile stance toward Jesus and sought by any means to drive Him out or even kill Him. It was to such people that Jesus told the parable of the vineyard.

A certain man planted a vineyard. Having become the owner of the vineyard, he planted it, surrounded it with a fence, dug a winepress, built a watchtower, leased it to some farmers, and then left. This was not merely a place to grow and harvest grapes, but a place to make wine. The owner had perfectly prepared all the equipment needed for winemaking. 12:2 “When the harvest time came, I sent my servant to the farmers to collect the fruit of the vineyard.”

Since there is a period between harvesting the grapes and letting them ripen, the “harvest time” referred to here is several years after the vineyard was leased out. The owner of the vineyard contacted the farmers. I was sent to collect the harvest. However, instead of giving me my share of the harvest, the farmers assaulted me. Since the owner did not receive his share, he sent another servant. But that servant, and the next one, and the one after that, were all beaten, insulted, or even killed. Presumably, the farmers were not idle and did not neglect their duties while the vineyard was entrusted to them. They grew the grapes, harvested them, aged them into wine, and sold it, receiving money from the people. They sought to keep all of that profit for themselves. The word “master” also carries the meaning of “owner.” The owner of the vineyard is the one who originally established it. For the farmers, the vineyard was, in essence, something entrusted to them.

In this parable, the “farmers” of the vineyard refer to the people of Israel, or to the religious leaders speaking with Jesus at that time. The “owner of the vineyard” refers to God. The “servants” whom God sent time and again refer to the prophets. Looking back at the time of the Old Testament, the prophets sent by God were always treated with contempt. Jeremiah 7:25–26 reads: “From the day your ancestors came out of Egypt until today, I have sent my servants the prophets to you again and again. Yet you have not obeyed me or paid attention; instead, you have stiffened your necks and become worse than your ancestors.” Prophets—a history in which the words of those entrusted with God's message have been disregarded. This is also a history of people rejecting God's word.

2) The Vineyard Owner's Share

There is one line spoken by the vineyard owner in this parable: "They will respect my son." This refers to Jesus Christ, God's beloved only Son. "They will respect my son." Normally, one wouldn't think that way. As a parent, you wouldn't want to send your beloved son to the very farmers who had repeatedly harmed your servants; precisely because he is your precious son, you wouldn't want him to be harmed. Yet the owner sent his son.

Why did he send his son? To claim his "share" of the vineyard's harvest. This "share" does not refer to the money earned from selling wine. In a normal relationship, the owner lends the land, has others work it, and receives a percentage of the profits from the wine sales—that is the standard arrangement, isn't it? The owner wanted to restore a right relationship with the farmers. The "share" the owner truly sought was to build a good relationship.

In Old Testament times, people offered "sacrifices" to maintain their relationship with God. Many animals—such as cows, sheep, and goats—were sacrificed. They shed the blood of these animals as a sacrifice to ask God to forgive their sins. Furthermore, when God told Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, Abraham was prepared to do so. This is not to say he did not cherish his child. Rather, Abraham was so eager to "build a good relationship" with God that he was willing to go to such lengths. If God had told me to "sacrifice my son," I honestly think I would have refused. Today, we no longer offer animal sacrifices. This is because Jesus Christ became the final sacrifice. The blood of Christ, shed on the cross, has cleansed us of all our sins.

I have a friend who is a Buddhist monk, and he once told me, "In Buddhism, love is considered attachment. So in that context, love isn't really a good thing. Christian love, on the other hand, has a gentle, all-encompassing quality—it's wonderful." Certainly, I believe God's love is, above all, gentle and possesses a capacity to embrace all sins. However, at times I also think that Christian love might be something close to the words "attachment" or "obsession." This is by no means meant in a negative sense; rather, it means that God has poured out upon us, without expecting anything in return, a love that is incredibly persistent, agonizing, and heart-wrenching. In other words, it is a tenacious, patient love. I don't think God would have sent His beloved Son to those cruel farmers if it were merely a matter of gentle, enveloping love. It was precisely because of that patient love—a love so strong that He was willing to send His only Son, even at the risk of that Son being harmed or killed, just to establish a good relationship with us—that God sent His beloved Jesus into this world, thinking, "If it's my Son, they will surely honor Him." This is because God sought from people what belongs to Him—that is, for them to turn their hearts toward Him. God sent His beloved Son into this world because He desired a "good relationship" with people to that extent and sought reconciliation. No matter how many times His trust was betrayed, He never stopped hoping.

3) Parables in the Gospel of Mark

Although the Bible contains many accounts of Jesus speaking in parables, the Gospel

of Mark actually includes only two major parables of Jesus. One is the Parable of the Sower in Chapter 4, and the other is this Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants. The Parable of the Sower was spoken to those who believed in Jesus. It tells us that while the seeds of grace sown on rocky ground or among thorns will not bear fruit, those that fall on good soil will yield a harvest—some even a hundredfold. If our hearts are like the soil, the message is that we should become good soil, receive the seeds of grace, and bear good fruit. On the other hand, the Parable of the Vineyard was spoken to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders—that is, to those who opposed Jesus. Although He speaks in a way that rebukes them—“It is you who have not heeded the words of the servants sent by the master; that is, the prophets; it is you who have insulted and beaten them”—the message He wishes to convey actually shares common ground with the Parable of the Sower. It is a call to properly tend to our human hearts, which are likened to the soil and the vineyard. In other words, Jesus was addressing both those who believed in him and even those who regarded him as an enemy and sought to kill him, urging them equally: “Have a heart that accepts God’s word; turn your hearts toward God.”

4) The “Vineyard” of Our Lives

This parable can also be interpreted as referring to our lives. The owner of the vineyard is God, and the beloved son whom the owner sent in the end is Jesus Christ. In this case, we are the tenants. Everything we possess has been given to us and prepared by God. Our bodies, our lives, our time, and this journey—our very lives—are all gifts from God. None of this truly belongs to us. It is a “trust” from God. God is the true owner. Yet, we often find ourselves thinking, “This is mine.” When that happens, we may reject God’s invitation to a good relationship with Him. Our hearts may drift away from Him. Even so, God never gives up hope on us—even when we, like the vineyard workers who disregarded His word, reject Him time and time again.

“If it were my son, they would respect him.” I feel that these words reveal God’s deep desire: “I want you to respect my Son.” What God earnestly desires from us is the very same “share” that the owner of the vineyard asked of the farmers: “to build a good relationship” and “to turn our hearts toward Him.” No matter how many times He was betrayed, He never abandoned us or gave up hope; ultimately, He sent us His beloved only Son, Jesus Christ. It is through Christ’s cross and His grace that we have been forgiven and have finally been able to build a good relationship with God.

5) The Eight-Pointed Cross, Repentance

12:9 “What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do? He will surely come back, kill those farmers, and give the vineyard to others.” The conclusion of Jesus’ parable states that “the owner will kill the farmers.” At first glance, this seems to strongly convey that God will pass judgment on those who oppose Jesus. While the “landowner” in Jesus’ parable acted in this way, what about God Himself? God’s beloved only Son, sent into this world, was treated with contempt, just like the other prophets. Although there were those who believed in Jesus, when the voices and momentum of His opponents grew stronger, He

was beaten, insulted, crucified, shed His blood, and died.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, there is a type of cross known as the “Hattian Cross.” In addition to the vertical and horizontal beams found on crosses like the one in our church, it features a short horizontal beam above Jesus’ head and a diagonal beam at His feet. The horizontal beam above Jesus’ head represents the sign of His charges. Jesus was put on trial on the grounds that He had claimed to be the “King of the Jews.” The diagonal beam at Jesus’ feet symbolizes the faith of the two men crucified on either side of Him.

Luke 24:39–43: One of the criminals who had been crucified there hurled insults at Jesus. “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other one rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you even fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are receiving the due punishment for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

With Jesus on the cross at the center, on the left is the man who mocked Jesus, and on the right is the man who confessed his faith at the very last moment. It is said that these diagonal beams serve to convey the depth of human sinfulness and the importance of repentance. However, this is probably not meant to say, “If you don’t repent, you will be judged.” If that were the case, it would simply be a threat. Rather, I believe it conveys the message: “Even people like this were loved by the Lord Jesus.” To repent means to turn one’s heart toward God. The two men crucified on either side of Jesus—the one who repented at the very end and the one who continued to mock Jesus until the very end—we could become either of them.

There are times when our hearts are turned directly toward God, and there are times when we forget about God altogether and focus only on ourselves. Like the vineyard workers, we regard our own lives as our own. We forget that God is our Owner. We cannot see God as our “Master.” There are times when we fail to honor Jesus, the Son of God. Even though we are like this, Jesus desires to save us. In another passage (John 12:47), Jesus says, “I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”

Jesus told the parable of the vineyard to those who opposed him. Moreover, he spoke with great severity. Was it not because he wanted them to listen and turn back to him? He spoke these words precisely because He wanted to save them. When He said in the parable, “The master will kill the farmers,” it may have been Jesus’ own warning—a way of saying, “I hope this doesn’t actually happen; I want you to wake up, turn toward God, and repent.”

There are times when we walk in obedience to God’s Word, and there are times when we forget about God and walk as if this life and our very existence belong solely to ourselves. Yet even when we fail to honor Jesus—when we insult and hurt Him—the Savior, Jesus Christ, was born into this world to save even us. God, who sent His beloved only Son to us, is seeking to build a good relationship with us even at this very moment. He longs for us to turn our hearts toward Him. I want to be someone who responds to that desire and walks forward with God as my Master.