

A woman saw a wine connoisseur eating grapes. She said to him, “Dude, you have to wait!”

There’s a real sense in which grapes exist solely to be made into wine. Wine is a theme throughout the Bible, and wine is especially prevalent in the Gospel accounts where Jesus sits down to eat and drink with all manner of people.

And as we quickly approach Easter, we have wine on the minds as we hear the parable of the wicked tenants. **THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD PRESSES GRAPES INTO WINE.**

There is no wine without pressure. To access the juice in the grapes that will ferment into wine, the winemaker must press or crush the grapes and let that liquid ferment. The yeast that is naturally on the skins of the grapes will aid in the process of turning grape juice into wine. But the first step is to collect the grapes.

**I. The Lord of the Vineyard presses His land for grapes. “And [Jesus] began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.”**

The Psalmist writes, “**The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,**” This is the heart of stewardship. Christian stewardship teaches us: everything belongs to God; we’re just borrowing it.

We are not unlike the tenant farmers in this text, everything we have is God’s and He expects us to make a good return on what He has lent us. Our houses, our possessions, our blessings don’t exist for their own sake, they exist to give us our essentials so we can glorify God through what we say and do.

This congregation is full of generous people who have given their time, talents, and treasure to the work of the Gospel here in our community. The roof over our heads is evidence of this. What a blessing it is to have a new roof in the works that will shelter this sanctuary for years to come. Yet even this sanctuary doesn’t exist just to be a big room. It exists to invite the community and gather our prayer and song together to worship the Lord of the Vineyard.

When Jesus was preaching this parable, He had the nation of Israel in mind. The people of Israel had their fair share of ups and downs throughout their existence, but the reason the Lord of the Vineyard lent this land to rulers of Israel was so they could be a light to the nations and the glory of His people Israel.

Even more pointedly, Jesus preached this parable against the religious leaders: the scribes and the chief priests who used their status to serve themselves rather than those entrusted to their care. Keeping their overlords happy, keeping the things the way they were, and patting themselves on the back became the order of the day. They forgot the stewardship motto of “God owns it: we’re just

borrowing it.” They forgot vineyards are for grapes and the Lord was coming to collect some fruit.

The truth comes out when the Lord sends servants to come to collect. II. The Lord of the Vineyard presses tenants to murderers through His Son. The tenants of the vineyard thought they were the owners, but when a servant came to visit, that dispelled this myth.

The truth is: God owns it; we’re just borrowing it. You can lie to hide the truth, but as the truth presses in, the lies need to get more and more extravagant to hide the reality.

In this parable of the wicked tenants, the Lord of the Vineyard presses the tenants with each subsequent servant. For each servant the tenants reject, the next servant is treated worse and worse. The first one is beaten. The second is beaten and treated shamefully. The third is wounded—literally traumatized—and cast out.

The truth is: God owns it; we’re just borrowing it. As the Lord kept on sending messengers to preach this truth, the tenants increased their resistance because they didn’t want to hear it. By pressing them into this behavior, the Lord of the Vineyard demonstrates the character of the vineyard occupants.

How far will the tenants go to live in their fantasy? That’s the question the hearers of the parable are wondering. **“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** Do you think the Lord of the Vineyard didn’t know what was going to happen to His Son? If the first three servants were crushed, would the Son also escape the winepress?

The Son demonstrates that these tenants weren’t just overly protective of what was lent to them. They believed the lie: God owned it once upon a time, but now it’s under new management. We’re the owners of the vineyard: “mine, mine, mine!”

How often do we believe that lie? Yet God sends truth to press those lies right out of us? A financial crisis shakes us out of the fiction that all we have is because of *our* hard work. A health scare dispels our illusions about us living forever on this earth. A nervous breakdown from the pressures of work blows away the fable that success is just a matter of one more hour on the clock or peace is just another weekend on the river.

God owns it; we’re just borrowing it. Faith Lutheran Church exists to share with all, God’s love through Christ and His promise of salvation! (Shepherd of the Hills exists To make disciples for Christ, beginning in our congregation and continuing in our community, our country, and the world.) How often do we believe the lie that Faith Lutheran Church exists for its own sake? We are called to

be a beacon of hope to all who gather here and a sending point to minister to the Coulee Region to produce the sweet fruit of repentance, lives changed, and peace with God.

Just as each servant sent to the tenants further revealed their hearts eventually culminating in the murder of the Son, so too the cross condemns you. The cross reminds you that your sins killed Jesus. The cross is the culmination of all your selfish, sinful desires. The cross is proof positive that in a similar situation you would have done no differently than the wicked tenants, the religious elites, or the Romans who nailed Jesus to that tree.

**“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”** For many on that day, they’ll see a cross, but it will stand as a witness against their selfishness, against their “me, me, me” attitude, against the lengths to which they went to bury their head in the sand and convince themselves it’s their vineyard and God came just to steal grapes for which He didn’t work to drink wine He doesn’t deserve.

But we as Christians see what’s waiting on the other side of the cross. III. The Lord of the Vineyard presses murderers into heirs to make wine. **“But [Jesus] looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”** Christ’s suffering and death is the cornerstone which is a stumbling block to His enemies, but comfort to His sons and daughters.

Look at the cross and be broken to pieces as you see your sins crush Jesus. Look at the cross and wail as the skin of this man is torn open by whips, thorns, nails, and a spear. Look at the cross and say, **“Surely not!”** as you see the Son of God breathe His last.

But you cannot make wine without crushing grapes. Wine to gladden men’s hearts is not produced unless fermentation decays what once was sweet. Let’s be honest, grapes exist to be made into wine. The cross is the winepress where murderers are crushed into inheritors.

Christian Stewardship tells us: God owns it, we’re just borrowing it. Christians gladly take on a righteousness and innocence that we never earned or deserved. Christians gladly and willingly cultivate a vineyard that isn’t ours, and freely love others who don’t deserve it. On the other side of the cross is Easter, and Easter shows us a Son who overcame the assaults of the wicked tenants and stands in their midst and says, **“Peace to you!”** The Lord of the Vineyard sacrifices His Son so that murderers could be forgiven—so that sons and daughters could be pressed out of wicked orphans. The cross stands as a record of your sins *forgiven*.

**“And [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not**

**drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.””** Brothers and Sisters of Faith Lutheran and fellow guests who have been confirmed in the faith. Today God’s Kingdom comes, let us join at the table wherein we partake of the meal where blood and wine is poured out for you. Let us drink with the Son of the Lord of the Vineyard who spared no expense to make us heirs of all His gifts.  
Amen!