

Safeguarding God's Vineyard

Year A, Proper 22; Matthew 21:33-46; Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:7-14

Grace Church, Newton, MA

October 8, 2023

Intro from the Rev. Megan Holding:

Tammy was disappointed not to be here with you this morning. She was disappointed not only because of her absence, but also because today's lessons are so timely for you here at Grace, with the tower dedication and your celebration of Grace's 150th anniversary next Sunday. So, instead of me preparing a sermon, Tammy asked that I share this message with you. The following are her words.

Good morning, Grace. What a disappointment not to worship with you this morning. It was such a joy to be here for the first time last Sunday. I am particularly disheartened to be away so soon.

I am often surprised by the mysterious way the Holy Spirit moves in our lectionary. And this week did not disappoint. Today's lessons seem to speak directly into Grace's context as we pass through this time of renovation, of transition, of laying a new foundation for a shared future together.

When the community was passing through the challenges of these last few years, at times – as in today's reading from Isaiah – it might have seemed like the local vineyard here in Newton Corner, Grace's watchtower from which once rang beautiful hymns – it might have seemed that *these* hedges might be trampled down and laid waste. At times – as in today's Psalm – it might have seemed that the walls of this vineyard – this sacred gathering place – might be broken down and that all who passed by might be free to pluck the fruit that generations had labored so hard to bring forth in this place. These have been hard years. Grace's situation may have seemed insurmountable at times. Many may have felt some of the same emotions expressed in today's psalm of lament.

From afar, though, to those who have watched and admired Grace Church these last years, this parish has shined as a beacon of hope. The community has become even stronger because of the way these challenges were navigated. Grace has built a steady, stable foundation from which to face the future with hope. To paraphrase today's reading from Matthew, the stone that – for a while – may have appeared rejected continues to be “a cornerstone of God's justice and peace. This was God's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes” (Matt 21:42).

In contrast to Paul who counsels the Philippians to “forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13b). I encourage us here at Grace church to *always remember* what lies behind. This experience of these past years is a reflection of the strength of this community, the resourcefulness, the vision, the openness to the movement of God and the steadfast faith that God would abide throughout. Remember this, recognize these strengths in this parish, as together we move into a new future.

And with the psalmist, we pray:

“Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;
behold and tend this vine;
preserve what your right hand has planted” (Psa 80:14).

May it be so. Amen.