



God at Work
Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (October 8, 2023)

On Wednesday, October 4th, we celebrated the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. He was a 12th-century monk who cared deeply about creation. Many people commemorate him by blessing animals, recognizing our responsibility to care for creation and the creatures God entrusted to us. We did so at the Humane Society in Brooksville with the scope of offering a blessing to the animals and a word of hope to the participants. God is Lord of the Universe and invites us to a life of reconciliation and integration with the rest of creation. God's economy calls us into a life of communion in the Spirit of Jesus, integrated with the rest of creation.

Just as we are entrusted as stewards over the earth and all of her creatures, in today's Gospel story, the tenants were responsible for caring for the landowner's vineyard. The landowner sent his servants to collect his share of the produce during harvest time. But the tenants seized the servants – beating one, killing another, and stoning the third. After this happened again, the landowner sent his son to collect the produce from the tenants, assuming they would respect him. They did not and murdered the landowner's son. Jesus concludes the parable with a question for his hearers, the elders and chief priests: "When the landowner returns to his vineyard, what will he do to those tenants?"

In sharing this parable, Jesus calls out the religious leaders (the tenants) for abusing God's people (the vineyard). The landowner (God) entrusted the religious leaders to lead the people of Israel with mercy and care. Yet, they have harmed the people, disobeyed God, and killed the servants (the Prophets) and the landowner's son (Jesus). On the surface, this story is about wicked tenants, but underneath, the parable critiques the religious leaders and holds them accountable for their failure to care for God's people.

That critique is extended to all people of God called to work in God's vineyard. The point of the parable is not judgment per se but a challenge to people so that they may love all, including enemies, until the end. Surely, judgment follows, but one's moral drive toward loving all or caring for God's world is not by punishment or judgment but by the love of God which they received. It's a matter of good stewardship: how do we manage the gifts we have received?

But how do we switch from duty to joy, from a "have to" to a "want to" decision? Paul gives us a clue. He has fallen in love with the Lord and desires nothing else but to know him and live by his Spirit. Human measurements of "spiritual" success and respectability are not a clue to divine acceptance. We do not gain or merit grace. We are not entitled to God's favor just because we do spiritual work. Grace is freely given. God's love is not bought with good behavior or ministry activity. We do spiritual work as a response to God's love. It's a matter of practicing our love for the Lord. We want to grow in love.

May we shine with the light of God's love for all people. Amen.