

- The parable story today is a continuation of the parable story Jesus told last week. We remember that Jesus hurled these stories at the Chief priests and the Elders of the people. These stories are thrown like rocks. We are amazed that Jesus was so confrontational. He wasn't backing down. No wonder they hated him. He called these people out. Just to show how confrontational Jesus was, he said to the Chief Priests and the Elders, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you." Thousands of years later we can still hear their growling. We can see the rage rising up.
- And we can hear their response, "Who do you think you are talking to us like that? We are the spiritual leaders of the people. We are accustomed to and we expect a lot of respect. Nobody talks to us like that!" To taunt these holy people still further Jesus tells them his parable from today's gospel. Jesus was not backing down. He was really having a go at these people. Consider a vineyard where the tenants refused to fulfill their part of the bargain. When they should be paying their debts, their dues to the landlord, instead they seized the messengers and killed them. When they should show respect to the landowner's son, instead, they killed him. You are those people.
- The chief priests and the elders knew precisely what Jesus meant by his story. Jesus was telling them off to their faces, when nobody dared to. This is God's vineyard! This is not yours! God gives you rights as tenants and caretakers, but you also have obligations to Him. You are not fulfilling your part of the bargain. You are acting like you own the vineyard, like you call the shots around here and we are supposed to say that is fine by us. You show disrespect to the landlord, and to his servants. You even killed the son.
- It's an amazing device that we can say one thing but mean something completely different. The priest knows he delivered a great sermon when someone comes up to him after Mass and says, "You were talking about me, Father, weren't you?" Jesus was accusing the Religious Establishment of abusing their positions of authority to balance the scales in their favor. You can say that you are servants of the people. You can say that you have people's interest at heart. But you don't really.
- Throughout the ages the Lord God has sent his prophets to speak His word to you, but you killed them all. Because you didn't like God's word you set yourselves up as combatants against the God you say you worship. I accuse you of being phony. I see you as you really are. I take the mask away from your faces and I reveal who you really are to the people. You are no servants of the people that I recognize.
- Those who put themselves into positions of power like to create dynasties for themselves. They like to hold onto power. We have witnessed that many times in history. We don't like it when our spiritual leaders and our civil leaders serve their own self-interest. We

want people who speak truth to power. Jesus was doing that right there and then. There is a price to pay. Jesus paid it with his own life. Many others paid with their own lives. But, the truth wins out. We get the spiritual and temporal leaders we deserve because we vote for them. We do not discern. We prefer to score points against the other side.

- Throughout history, not just in the Bible, prophetic people have spoken out. They speak and they make sense. There are forces out there who will silence us. Sometimes we feel powerless to do anything. Sometimes it is hard to speak God's words. Sometimes it is hard to hear God's voice. In the middle of this tense conversation Jesus makes His point very clearly, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?" Eventually the truth wins out. That which is hidden will eventually be revealed. And when it does, Jesus says, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.
- In the midst of our unrest we cry out to God. The words of the psalm speak our words today, "Once again O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted. The Son of man whom You Yourself made strong. Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name, O Lord, God of hosts, restore us; if your face shines upon us, then we shall be saved."