



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

"Who has the Authority and Who Produces Fruits?"

Mathew 21:33-46

18th Sunday after Epiphany – October 8, 2017

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Matthew, the 21st chapter, the first chapter.

My dear family in Christ, much of what is written in Matthew goes towards answering the question, **"What is the kingdom of God like?"** Many of the sentences or pronouncements indeed begin, **"The kingdom of God is like..."** We need not think of a castle with turrets and crenelated parapets. What that phrase really means is that **"the reign of God is like...this."**

When **"kingdom"** gets mentioned, or **"reign,"** we often think of authority. We in turn want to ask **"How is this authority going to be wielded?"** and **"Who really wields this authority?"**

Well, our text comes after Jesus is asked by whose authority He is doing what He is doing and saying what He is saying. It also flows out of Mother Zebedee's request that her two sons share in wielding whatever authority Jesus of Nazareth is going to have; one on His right side, the other on His left. Such a request arises out of wanting **"all of this"** to be theirs. What a coup, to be the queen mother of such important men, second only to this Jesus of Nazareth! Such a desire – to be in

charge of **“all this”** – takes us back to Satan’s temptation of Jesus on the mountain top, o’er looking all the kingdoms of the world. That’s authority. That’s reign. That’s the wielding of power.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s back it up a moment. Jesus is speaking before the chief priests and elders. They are questioning His authority. And so, Jesus speaks this parable about the way in which they, along with all of Israel, have time after time questioned the authority of those whom God has sent to speak with them.

Prophet after prophet after prophet has come before the children of Israel. The true prophets have warned the children of Israel about their wayward hearts. Just ask anyone taking part in our Life Light Bible Studies this autumn as we work our way through Jeremiah and then Lamentations.

But the people, led by the leaders of the people, don’t listen. They see the prosperity that is before them, the blessings of a providential God that they have come to know and now take for granted. They have come to believe that all this is to be theirs. It’s their divine right. It’s their manifest destiny, regardless of what God’s emissaries say. In fact, let’s get rid of these problematic prognosticators. They are spoiling our solitude, they are challenging our rightful place here – they are harshing our mellow.

Jesus is pointing out how that pattern of the past is now being carried forward in the present age. Jesus, as the only-begotten Son of the Father, has come to speak with them about the reign of God that is coming in. And the present rulers, seeking to maintain the status quo, are looking at this Christ Jesus and thinking **“if we can kill Him, all of this will be ours – without squabble, without scruple – it will be ours!”**

They are seeking all of the present to be theirs without acknowledging Who it is that really owns it. They seeking to be rulers over all of the present without understanding that from Adam on

down mankind had been put in the place of being Stewards, not owners. The One Who really owns all of this, the One with authority, the One who reigns, is the Master, the Father in heaven.

Oh yes, they are going to kill the heir of the vineyard. They are going to kill Jesus of Nazareth, in hopes that they might, retaining their privileged position, be able to gain “title” over all of creation.

How ironic for them. It will be in the killing of this Lord of Life, it will be in the crucifixion of this Christ Jesus that they will learn who the true heir is. It will be in Christ Jesus’ resurrection that complete authority over heaven and earth will be revealed. It will be His. He is the first fruits of all creation. He is the One revealed to be the Righteous One – the One Who will have all things put under His feet upon His triumphant return.

That is the lesson for you and me. We are the ones who are tempted to look at this life and, thinking that perhaps this is all that there is, we should seek to rule the here and now, we should reign in this place.

We seek to put the wonders of creation at our disposal, at our whim. We think we know the best about how to care for this creation. We think we can determine what is truth, here and now, regardless of what the scripture has to share with us. We think we can terminate a life or a marriage whenever we choose. We think we can determine what a life is or what a marriage is, however we choose.

But Christ Jesus has revealed a number of things to us in His passion, death and resurrection. He is the one Who has forgiven our wrong-heartedness, our lack to God’s priorities. He has revealed to us that He is, indeed, the heir of all creation. He will be the one under whose feet the Father puts all authority.

And He reveals to us in this lesson that we are stewards of the world. God is the Master. We are the ones responsible for caring for the creation and that God is looking for those who will produce and render to Him their fruits.

Allegiance to God is what's important. It is greater than all the world. After all, **“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” Mark 8:36**

God calls for those who will produce fruits. That's what the text says.

Jesus is the One Who has produced the fruits of everlasting life. The fruits He has produced with His resurrection have revealed to us His authority. He has forgiven us and in that forgiveness He provides the strength we need to produce the fruits of that forgiven life.

So, how do we produce fruits? Well, that brings us to the other parable in this mix – the parable of the two sons. The first son gives lip service but refuses to do what the Father asks. It's as if he is the one who signs the contract for the vineyard – but refuses to yield the crops, to pay the rent. He is the ultra-religious zealot of Israel Who speaks the words of God but will not follow through with them.

He is you and me when we have gone through the ten commandments, we who know their meanings, but think the exigencies of the day outweigh the observance of the moment. He is you and me when we take God's name so very lightly, and indeed, in vain. He is you and me when we see our fellow man and yet treat him or her as if they are only objects for our use, for our amusement.

The second son admits he wants nothing to do with what God has decreed. But then he has a second thought. He is moved to understand that God is greater than this world. He understands that a relationship with God is more important than possessing many things. He sees what God has done in the passion death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to redeem him, to forgive her. He knows that

producing fruits for God is showing allegiance and rendering obedience to what is far greater than what he or she is.

This is the one producing fruits. It is to this that God has called us. It is here that God reigns. It is here that the kingdom of God is revealed. It is in the reaction to the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus for reconciliation with God, the life lived as God's own, here and now, that the Master is pleased, that the Heir is served, that Christ Jesus is Lord of this world and of the life of the world to come. Amen