



Worship resources Trinity 16

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The issue of legalism – of prioritising law over love – may be thought as a "spiritual" problem only. However, as we allow this week's Lectionary to speak, we discover that the way the law is used in both so-called "sacred" and "secular" contexts can be equally life-giving and/or equally destructive. The challenge is to allow the law its proper place, and use it to lead us to life, while ensuring that the same gift of life is available to all.

May we our worship lead us beyond legalism into a life that clearly demonstrates the power of the law of love.

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20: God speaks God's commandments to the people of Israel who are terrified by the thunder, lightning, smoke and trumpet sounds. They ask Moses to speak to God on their behalf, because of their fear, but Moses reassures them that God is simply keeping the people in awe so they don't sin.

OR **Isaiah 5:1-7**: A prophecy of judgement in which the people of Israel and Judah are likened to a vineyard which God tends and cares for, but which produces rotten grapes instead of good ones.

Psalms 19: A psalm celebrating creation which proclaims God's glory, and God's law which enlightens brings reward to those who keep it.

Philippians 3 : 4b-14

We have been hearing week by week Paul's reflections in prison. Now his mind turns towards the future. No worldly advantages compare with knowing Christ - that is, a deep experience of his renewing power - and Paul longs to know

more and understand more, even though in this life such knowledge can only be partial.

Matthew 21 : 33-46

Jesus takes the familiar metaphor of Israel as God's vineyard, and turns it into a castigation of those with responsibility for tending it. All those whom God sent to guide and direct, even his own son, were reviled and rejected.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Exodus%2020:%201-4,%207-9,%2012-20%0Acw%20Psalm%2019%0APhilippians%203:%204b-14%0AMatthew%2021:%2033-46

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Lord, we beseech thee,
let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church;
and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour,
preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

O Lord,
Hear the prayers of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

That we might be moved to forgiveness not seven times, but seventy times seven, we pray saying, "God of Forgiveness," and respond, "Hear our prayer."

That the church might confess hurtful doctrine, exclusive practice and misguided

zeal and be the first to make restitution, we pray saying, God of Forgiveness,
C:

Hear our prayer.

That the leaders of the nations and the poor of the earth might sit down at table
and rejoice together, we pray saying, God of Forgiveness,
Hear our prayer.

For all suffering the death of a loved one, who mourn words they did not speak
when they had opportunity, that they might now gently forgive themselves.
God of Forgiveness,
Hear our prayer.

That those in our parish who bear grudges for other members of Christ's church
might be reconciled today as we share the peace. God of Forgiveness,
Hear our prayer.

That all who seek baptism and confirmation might daily be transformed by
God's extravagant
grace. God of Forgiveness,
Hear our prayer.

That those who are unloved in this world; those who are outcast and friendless,
might experience Christ's gentle compassion in this community of faith. God
of
Forgiveness,
Hear our prayer.

For courage to forgive others as we, ourselves, have been forgiven, we
humbly
pray. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

Let us offer prayers to God for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts and for all in every danger and need.

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

Lord, have mercy.

For all peoples and their leaders, for candidates for public office, and for justice and righteousness in the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who work, and for tenants and landlords.

Lord, have mercy.

For good weather, and for those who harvest and offer the fruits of the earth.

Lord, have mercy.

For all domestic and wild animals.

Lord, have mercy.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers and refugees, prisoners and their families, and the dying and dead.

Lord, have mercy.

For our city/town/parish and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Lifting our voices with all creation and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

O Lord our God, who sent your Son to save the whole world, hear the prayers we offer this day and strengthen us to press on toward the heavenly goal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

God of mercy,
through our sharing in this holy sacrament
you make us one body in Christ.
Fashion us in his likeness here on earth,
that we may share his glorious company in heaven,
where he lives and reigns now and for ever.

PRAYERS

God of all who wander in the wilderness,
you go before us as beacon and guide.
Lead us through all danger,

sustain us through all desolation,
and bring us home to the land
you have prepared for us. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God, our beloved,
you set before us the goal of new life in Christ.
May we live in the power of his resurrection
and bring forth the fruit of your gentle and loving rule. Amen.

Holy God,
you love justice and hate oppression;
you call us to righteousness and not to exploitation.
Give us generous and loving hearts,
and eyes to see the splendor of your reign,
that we may live in truth and honor,
and praise you for the transformation of our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Psalm 19:

"The heavens are telling the glory of God." These famous words from the Psalm are often set to music...

This imagery of the sun "like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy", this personification of the sun draws to my mind Greek/Roman mythology, and no doubt made contemporaries of the psalmist think of similar images of sun-gods in other religions. The difference? Here the sun is put into place by God, not a god in itself.

God is more than gold, sweeter than honey. A simple message - but reminds us of things we put too often before God in our lives.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations..." This verse is often used by pastors before they begin preaching. I like it, but if there's a way to use a Bible verse too much to the point of over doing, this one makes it on my personal list!

Philippians 3:4b-14:

One of my least favorite things about Paul is that I feel he is always boasting about himself while pretending to be humble. But here, he actually is making good, thoughtful points about his identity and his identity in Christ. A faithful Jew all his life, Paul says his faith identity would give him reason to boast **except** that now, in Christ, these things are "regard[ed] as loss." Why? These things simply aren't important in Christ: in Christ there is no Greek or Jew.

"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead." The them here is of a clean slate. It isn't easy to forget the past. Indeed, it is not always wise either. But what Paul urges here is to forget the identity that was without Christ, so that we can focus on 'the prize' of living fully in Christ in the present/future.

"I press on." We can't underestimate the importance of simply pressing on, I think, even when we struggle. We just press on, try again, reach toward the goal.

Matthew 21:33-46:

Jesus tells stories about his identity. The landowner/tenants story is interesting - it almost reads like "God should have expected Jesus to be killed" - which isn't helpful.

Looking for more help, I check [Chris Haslam's comments](#). Now it makes more sense. Jesus is saying: God will find tenants who will produce. Do we want to be tenants? What will we produce for the landowner? If we produce nothing, why would that landowner want us to stay as tenants? The Pharisees get that Jesus is talking about them, but remain immobilized. Do you ever feel that way? The scriptures you *know* are calling you to accountability, and yet you still do not act. Jesus is calling us to action!

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

This week is a challenging follow on from last week, and may, in some ways, appear to contradict it. Where last week's emphasis was on inclusivity, and the Living Water of God that flows into every nook and cranny, this week the central image is the Law, and on how some are excluded from God's life because they have allowed the Law to become stagnant, repressive and legalistic. In the Exodus reading, the Moses journey continues, with the Israelites receiving God's Law. But, because of their fear, they choose a

lifeless Law, passed on to them second-hand through Moses, over a relationship to which the Law is simply a doorway. Here the Law ends up being an end in itself, rather than a means to an end – intimacy with God. In the Isaiah reading, which connects with the Gospel, the Song of the Vineyard demonstrates what happens when God's people fail to live out the life that the Law is supposed to bring, and fail to find real relationship with God and one another. The fruit they produce, in this case, is rotten, rather than good and life-giving. In Philippians Paul, who could celebrate his righteousness under the law, express his disregard for legalistic purity, and embraces, rather, the life of Christ – both his resurrection and his suffering – for it is in Christ that he knows true life, and true connection with God and others. In Jesus' parable, it is the people of the law – the religious leaders, who are represented by the wicked tenants. Their inability to recognise their place as custodians of God's vineyard, and their unwillingness to receive the "farmer's son" reveals how their devotion to the law has robbed them and others of life, and has led them into a destructive legalism. In response to this, the Psalm offer us two songs that are helpful expressions of our longing for God, and our desire to keep God's law in its rightful place. In Psalm 19 God's law, like creation, is shown to be simply a way that God is revealed, and is a gift that brings life – which is as it should be. In Psalm 80 the response of grief and prayer for the vulnerable vineyard that has failed to produce fruit guides us away from judgement and into intercession for those (including ourselves) who make of the law an idol and end up producing fruit that is contrary to God's life and God's reign. So, here at last, we recognise that this week is not a contradiction of last week, but a development of it. The only ones who end up excluded are those who use the law to exclude others. The result is less a judgement than a consequence. When Christ seeks to include all, those who insist on excluding some, end up only excluding themselves. What a tragedy that the Law, which is designed to bring life, should become such a destructive idol for some – and what a warning against any tendency to legalism we might find in ourselves.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The issue of legalism may, at first glance, seem to be a purely religious one, with little relevance to wider society where the rule of law is usually held up as the only basis for organising society. However, on closer inspection some fascinating insights may emerge. To begin with the law, whether "secular" or "sacred" is never intended to be an end in itself. It is always only meant to be a way to a life of justice, peace, equity and community. When the law does its work well, people are encouraged to live considerately and respectfully, and to abide by principles that seek the common good. However, the law is too easily recruited to the very agendas that it is supposed to protect us against. One example might be the

aggressive way that copyright law is being enforced in the face of changing ways of consuming media and the arts. In a system where wealthy executives control intellectual property and make a lot of money out of it, there is little will to change to embrace new realities with the result that ordinary citizens are viewed as criminals, and even artists are prevented from benefiting from their own work when it has come under the control of powerful corporations. In similar ways, political lobby groups in industries as diverse as power, food production, pharmaceuticals and international trade ensure that lawmakers become their allies in the accumulation of wealth and the criminalising of anyone who would get in the way of their quest for profit. Again, lists upon lists of examples could be given, but you need look no further than the political influence exerted by petroleum companies, or the laws that control the use of patented seeds. The net result is that the law, which should have brought life, equity, justice and the common good, has been manipulated to favour the powerful, to pamper the rich and to keep the poor and unconnected in check. The vineyard is now truly producing rotten fruit, and those who point this out are often mocked, persecuted or even arrested. And this reality exists in so-called "developed" and "civilised" countries as much as those that are considered to be under the control of "tyrants". In the face of this, followers of Christ are called to speak the truth, to uphold the values of life, peace and justice, and stand against the law when it becomes the servant of evil and oppression. Such was the prophetic task of the Church in apartheid South Africa. Such remains the prophetic task of the Church in a world of fossil fuel dependence, widespread poverty, AIDS, war and globalisation.

LOCAL APPLICATION: The legalistic application of law is a destructive influence in relationships from families to faith communities. The parable of the vineyard is a powerful description of what this looks like. Legalistic people, who believe they control the "vineyard" (which can be truth, a particular community, a particular ministry, a family or a person), impose strict regulations on it, sucking all the "fruit" (energy, love, connection, wisdom, giftedness etc.) out of it and leave it in the position that it is only able to produce fruit that is rotten. Or, alternatively, they leave the "vineyard" in a situation where its fruit is available only for them. And, when others try to bring insight, healing or correction into this situation, the legalists react aggressively, using the law (or their version of it) as a club with which to beat all opponents. Such abuse is all too common in our churches and in the homes of those who claim to follow "the Bible". It's another situation in which the law (or the Bible) which is intended as a doorway to life, ends up becoming an end in itself, and robs life. It is this abusive use of the law that leads husbands to force their wives to "submit" or parents to force their children into terrified adherence. It is this abusive use of the law that leads

pastors to control their congregations through threats and self-righteous judgements. And it is this abusive use of the law that leads Christians to judge and condemn those with whom they disagree – even those whom they should consider to be their brothers and sisters in Christ. Whenever law becomes the focus of any relationship or community, people end up lifeless and battered. Ultimately the only "righteousness" that has value is that which Paul speaks about – the righteousness which is given to us as a gift in Christ, and which draws us into the life and joy of Christ's resurrection, even as it leads us to serve and love others with cross-embracing self-giving. From another perspective, the temptation is always there for us to choose law over the unpredictable, scary journey into intimacy with God. Like the Israelites, we may find dealing with God too difficult or frightening, and so we may settle for rituals or traditions which lose their ability to point us to God because we make them idols to replace God. Ultimately, the truth we must face this week is that whenever we choose law over relationship – with God or with one another – we lose life, and we become destructive, like vineyards that produce only rotten fruit.

SERMON OUTLINE 1

Matt 21:33-46 the wicked tenants... described as "a parable of the religious history of Israel.."

1. The Vineyard of the landlord 33: *a landowner planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country common in the East – cf absentee landlords in Ireland... The vineyard in OT represents Israel – cf Jer 2.21: I planted you like a choice vine of sound stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt wild vine?* Such was the failure of the Israelites...

2. The Violence of the tenants 34-41: seen in the Jews... **a) sent slaves:** ³⁴*When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way – Prophets... **b) sent his son:** ³⁷*"They will respect my son."* – but *they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him* – a direct prediction by Jesus of what awaited him... **i) the cruelty of the Jews** in rejecting God's Messiah.. **ii) the crucifixion of Jesus** – *outside the city wall...**

3. The Vindication of the son 42-46: *'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?' It is central to the building –*

vital for soundness and strength. We must build for the future upon Jesus:-
Christ is our cornerstone – on him alone we build. The Jews of old rejected Jesus – we in our day must respect him and accept him as our cornerstone!

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Day 1 - Who's in Charge Here? Matthew 21:33-46 "Who's in charge here?" can communicate so many different feelings. It may be in reaction to chaos, such as following a disaster, when we are looking for one who can make certain decisions. It can be a plea to help when the normal lines of communication are down. The preacher concludes that these words of Jesus in the gospel for today are a challenge to our culture of "ownership, autonomy, and self reliance."

[http://day1.org/1113-who is in charge here](http://day1.org/1113-who-is-in-charge-here)

America - Love's Labour Lost. The Bible itself offers a startling panorama of spurned love. Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" is a poignant reminder of such love. Today's Gospel, often inaccurately called the parable of the wicked tenants, is a virtual midrash or commentary on Isaiah's song. The plot is deceptively simple. This parable expresses what Abraham Joshua Heschel, in *God in Search of Man*, has called "the divine pathos," which is the great paradox of biblical faith—a longing God's pursuit of humanity.

http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2501

CHILDREN

[Sermons4kids.com](http://www.sermons4kids.com) Theme: Obeying God's commandments - Proper 22 (27) Year A **Object:** A coloring book **Scripture:** And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:1-3 (NIV)

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/stayinthelines.html>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[If Thou But Suffer God To Guide Thee](#)

[Where Cross The Crowded Ways Of Life](#)

[O For A Heart To Praise My God](#)

[Come Let Us To The Lord Our God](#)

[Forgive Us Now](#)

[The Ten Commandments Song](#)

[Out Of The Darkness](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[You Are](#)

[Creation's King](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title