

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost October 4, 2026

Commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi Season of Creation ends

Prayer of the Day

Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-46

[Jesus said:] 33 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away. 34 When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them in the same way. 37 Then he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ 39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41 They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

42 Jesus said to them, “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’?”

43 “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits. 44 The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46 They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

As Sunday approaches....

Sometimes preparing a sermon reminds me of looking at the rings of a tree and this week is certainly such an occasion.

The outer ring: Jesus is in mid-dispute with religious leadership over questions of authority and also because of his critique that there is some mis-use and abuse within his religious tradition. I emphasize (as does the Gospel of Matthew) that Jesus' intention is to fulfill the core of his faith tradition not do away with it. The story Jesus tells contains a nearly verbatim quote from the prophet Isaiah, a word picture that gives us a sense of how Jesus goes about integrating the traditions of his faith with his mission and purpose in his earthly life. The parable's grisly end foreshadow's Jesus' fate.

The next rings inward: For the community receiving Matthew's Gospel (some forty years after Jesus lived, died, rose again and ascended to heaven) questions of 'bearing fruit' in a time when their Temple was destroyed and the community fragmented was a vital question of the day; far from speculative or theoretical. Proclaiming Jesus risen and ascended is to say that as bad as the thieving and plundering are, they can't eradicate Jesus' love or God's love.

Today's connection to the commemoration of St. Francis and the conclusion of the Season of Creation (observed in the ELCIC, and the Anglican Church in Canada)

Preacher and teacher of preachers Rev. Dr. Carolyn Sharp of Yale Divinity school points to poignant contrast in the parable between the vineyard owner who lovingly plants and tends and protects the vineyard and those who plunder it. I think it's no stretch to liken the parable's vineyard to creation itself. How God lovingly creates and some people (and regimes) plunder and kill! The examples of plunder might well lead to pointing out that the planet is made sick from pollution and exploitation.

The vineyard might be a word picture of the kingdom of God as well—the Beatitudes and the sermon on the Mount followed by parable after parable open our imagination to the sort of world and existence God desires for us.

The prayer of St. Francis uses creation imagery too—and I detect a subversive tone to the prayer with lines such as “Where there is hate, we sow love”. Remember the parable where an enemy sneaks into a field to plant weeds. St. Francis upends the parable (for me anyway) by composing a prayer in which seeds of peace, reconciliation, and love are planted in fields that have been plundered. A quote often attributed to St. Francis is, “Always preach the Gospel. If necessary use words.”. So our action of planting might be words or it might be acts of kindness or even courage.

