

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR OCTOBER 4, 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7/Matthew 21:33-46

- In Isaiah, what is the fruit of the vineyard? What does this say about the fruit that God expects from us?
- Jesus in Matthew draws upon this passage from Isaiah, especially in its details about how the owner builds up the vineyard. But there are significant differences. How do these images differ? Specifically, who or what is punished in each account?
- In Jesus' parable, Jesus turns the focus of the vineyard from the vines to the tenants of the vines. In so doing, the parable becomes a critique of the religious leadership of his day. If we turn from Jesus' day to our own, how does this parable become a critique of the church? How does it call the church to act?
- When Isaiah speaks of being made a waste and "overgrown with briars and thorns," he applies the words to Israel and Judah. Are we all that much different from these words: "[The Lord] expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!"?
- One of my favorite writers Brian McLaren wrote the following:
But "the Christian religion" is neither the ultimate goal of Jesus nor the ultimate goal of God, in my view. Rather, the goal of Jesus is the kingdom of God, which is the dream of God, the wish and hope and desire of God for creation (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, 303)
How might this parable of Jesus reflect or illustrate McLaren's statement?



Psalm 80:7-15

- The psalm takes this same image of Israel as the vineyard and provides a stark contrast between its past glory and present state. Note how exaggerated the image becomes: the vine becomes so



large that the mountains are in its shadow and the towering cedars of Lebanon are dwarfed by it. In contrast, the land is now ravaged by wild boars with beasts grazing on its remains.

- The psalm here, however, becomes a midpoint for us as it turns into a plea for God to look upon us, tend us again and preserve us. May we use this same plea for our country, for our world.

Philippians 3:4b-14

- I offer up Paul's words here as a word of hope and a call for action. We are to regard all things as loss in pursuit of knowing Christ. Knowing Christ means for Paul – and perhaps for us as well – knowing Christ in his death so that we might experience resurrection. What must we die to that resurrection might happen? What must change within us?
- What does it mean to you to "regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8)? The language that Paul uses here is more graphic than what is translated. When Paul says that he regards all things as "rubbish," he uses the word *skubala*, which actually means "excrement." In other words, "*Skubala* happens."
- How can we encourage one another to the task Paul places before us, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (3:14)?
- Paul also recognizes that we never think that we have obtained the goal, but we still press on – "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead." We are feeling the strain right now, but may it continue to be a strain forward.