

Proper 22 Matt21: 33-46 Matthew YR A 2011 Pent. October 2

When my children were very little, I was in the interesting position of also being a child development professional. Therefore, I felt it very much my responsibility to model good child rearing practices as well as teaching those practices to others. Eyes were watching me. I had to practice what I preached. No losing my temper when one of my children misbehaved-especially not in public!

It was important that I believed, truly believed, for example, that spanking a child when that child hurt someone else was wrong. Truly wrong, because it only taught that violence begets more violence or that misbehavior begets misbehavior. I had to remind myself more than once that spanking was wrong, especially that time when my toddler climbed up into the meat display at the grocery store and people were watching *me* to see what I would do about it!

Today's Gospel story is yet another parable that confounds many people. I think, in fact, there is at least a small part of all of us that just, well, just can't be very generous and forgiving. A few weeks ago we experienced the fact that the owner of the vineyard paid everyone the same wages, whether they worked for a full day or just an hour. Like I said: some people just couldn't get past that kind of generosity to understand the enormity of God's extravagant abundance.

Today, Jesus tells the story of another owner of a vineyard who hires workers who kill the owner's slaves out of sheer greed. Instead of suggesting that those workers be put to a miserable death, Jesus surprises us again. He tells his followers "Have you never heard 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."

We continue to be amazed. We are amazed that Jesus does not respond to violence by using more violence. We are amazed that Jesus suggests to us that if we follow him, we also must not respond to those who misuse us by misusing them.

For several days this past week I went back to Kansas for our diocesan convention. I also attended a Sunday worship service and listened to my friend Fr. Rob Baldwin preach yet another one of his fine sermons. What I heard repeatedly during my stay, were discussions regarding the state of the Church today. All churches, as you surely have heard, are having a difficult time competing with our post modern world of practicality.

Its' not just the difference between what I call Bible farming and modern business that we struggle with. We compete with school sports that schedule practices for our children on Sunday morning, with changing technology that

contrasts with our very ways of praying and the physical spaces in which we pray. Some of us attend workshop after workshop that deal with welcoming people into our own worship spaces, when we sometimes refuse to consider being welcomed into any other but our very own brand of worship.

Jesus and his words of expansive generosity, forgiveness, love and hope for a peaceful kingdom are sorely tested, even ridiculed. Those of us who do come to church often find it easier to come for solace only and not for renewal.

I think there is an answer, though, to finding ways in which to grow God's Church. It is very simple, yet very hard to accomplish without giving in to our impulses to act like the people who believe in retribution and not restoration, who talk of justice but not of mercy, and who cannot forgive or forget in order to get on with their own lives and the lives of their loved ones, and even their not-so-loved-ones.

I think the answer is not (to borrow a phrase) that we need more "talkie talkie" but more "doie doie." We study, read, analyze and discuss all the things we can do to grow God's kingdom. Yet when we listen to what Jesus really tells us to do, well, that's' when we often run aground.

In that great hymn from Paul's letter to the Philippians, we heard last week of Christ emptying himself (another translation that I really like saying "pouring

himself out”) on the cross for us. This week we are given the opportunity, like Paul, “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, . . .” to press on to reach the goal, to make it our own.

There is a prize. With less “talkie talkie” and more “doie doie,” We become more like Jesus, we become part of God’s kingdom, and we draw more people into the love of Christ. He is our cornerstone. “This was the Lord’s doing, and it IS amazing.