SERMON Sunday, October 4, 2026 Pastor Cris Frigm

"Listen to another parable." Another vineyard story. Do we get it yet? Maybe. Are we going to keep hearing stories about what God is doing to create a kingdom for us? Most definitely.

A reminder of context: Jesus has been telling stories of vineyards, but a lot has been happening. This story follows directly after last week's, which followed directly after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the clearing of the temple. To say it was an antagonistically charged moment would be an understatement. It's the beginning of Holy Week. The chief priests and Pharisees have reached their breaking point and are ready to get rid of Jesus.

They were afraid of the crowds; they were afraid of public perception. They weren't interested in listening to Jesus and learning anything, they were looking to convince themselves and the crowd that they were the power of the world – that they held the keys to God's Kingdom. So, Jesus keeps telling them stories.

But this one doesn't start with "the kingdom of heaven is like…" Neither did last week's vineyard story. A couple weeks ago, before Jesus had entered Jerusalem, he had told a vineyard parable to describe the kingdom of heaven. That was the one where everyone was in, when everyone was equal. The last was first and *everyone* received God's grace.

But now, Jesus is challenging the authorities. Jesus is telling stories about the world. The parable of the two sons in the vineyard directly challenged whether the authorities were doing what God asked of them. Jesus tells a story today that happens again in the vineyard – an image that comes from Isaiah, an image the hearers would have been deeply connected to. Moreso than in the previous stories, Jesus sets this story squarely in a prophetic witness in which the vineyard is a metaphor for Israel. The winepress is there. The watchtower is there. And the tenants are there to tend what God had planted. Then it all goes wrong.

Listen to another parable.

It's been a weird and troublesome week around here. If I were writing stories about it, it would sound a little like this…

There was a technological visionary who invented a way of communicating – let's call it electronic mail – that reduced the time to send a message from days to seconds. And then people exploited it for devious purposes, looking to scam people for gift cards.

Some really smart people figured out how to efficiently and economically condition our indoor spaces with heat and air conditioning. And then the systems became so complicated that it's challenging to find ways to keep them running.

You'd think you could enjoy a nice lunch in a peaceful setting with a view of a historic street, but then it's shockingly interrupted by a pumpkin flying through the window. True story. It glanced off Mike's head on the way by.

A storm brings significant damage to our beach resorts.

Armed conflict continues around the world, and it's a political game with real lives hanging in the balance.

The story breaks that a young woman was victimized by seven men while 50 other men did nothing to help. And the system failed to protect her. Again.

It definitely didn't feel like the kingdom of heaven as a lived reality this week. It felt a little like the wicked tenants were winning. It makes me wonder where we *are* in this parable. If we're living in this vineyard, who has God sent and how have we responded?

Because that's the question being raised and answered by Jesus. As he continues to challenge the authority of the temple leaders, he continues to call them to account for **not** hearing what God has been saying.

A quick, but important, clarification, this passage has a long history of being used to call for the rejection of the Jewish people. They are equated to the tenants in this story who reject the prophets and kill the son. That interpretation has ben used to do great harm throughout history and it is a deeply flawed and hateful interpretation of this story. It ignores the immediate setting to justify a desired outcome. That isn't the point of this story.

This parable isn't a description of the kingdom of heaven. It's a story that describes the reality of the world. This is Jesus' way of telling it like it is, not as it is supposed to be, not as God has created it to be. In this world, in the places where worldly power is the final authority, violence and hate rules the day. Brokenness makes the rules as people *want* them to be, rather than the way God actually *made them to be*.

Did you notice how this story ends? The landowner sends his slaves to collect the fruits of the vineyard – as everyone had agreed he would – and they are driven out and killed. He sends other slaves and the same thing happens. He sends his **son** and logic goes off the rails and the tenants kill him so they can inherit the land. I'm not sure how that was going to work.

What does the vineyard owner do next? After everyone he has sent is driven out or killed, how does the vineyard owner respond? What does he **do?**

Nothing. That's the end of the "story." Jesus asks a question of the listeners – the temple authorities, "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

They answer as he expected them to. They answer with the worldly view of power and retribution. **They** reject the tenants and replace them with others who will stick to the agreement. That isn't part of the story.

But that answer is the point. The temple authorities still don't get it. They still aren't listening to what God is saying.

I've been pretty angry this week, wishing there was a way to get rid of everyone who just doesn't seem to listen; who doesn't seem to want to do what is right. They all deserve a "miserable death" to quote the…chief priests.

But none of that changes the truth of this parable. The cornerstone of the story is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The cornerstone of the covenant of God then and now is the one who goes to a cross, giving up everything, instead of responding in anger, giving into hate, trusting the world rather than trusting in the Messiah. The cornerstone is what Jesus is *going to do next*.

I don't know exactly how we're supposed to protect the most vulnerable in such difficult times. Justice and accountability still matter as we live together. But God's Kingdom is still real. The powers of this world do not win. The cross wins. Jesus cleared the temple for a reason. Jesus goes to the cross **for a reason.** The kingdom doesn't belong to the powerful of this world. It belongs to Jesus the Christ. As do we. Amen.