**Morning Praise @ Home 8th October 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Matthew 21: 33 – end

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**Reflection from John *Jesus turns the heat up***

In my dad’s shed was a large poster nailed to the wall. While Dad showed little interest in faith or religion the poster was one of those old fashioned Sunday School pictures of a blonde English looking Jesus telling stories to children.

Gentle Jesus meek and mild. Well today’s parable told by Jesus paints a different picture.

Jesus said to them “Listen to another parable.” He could have just said, “Get ready for another confrontation between the Pharisees and me.”

The passage we have just heard comes at a point in Matthew’s Gospel where, if you read it in context, the tension, which has been ramping up, is becoming unbearable and the climax of the greatest story ever told is about to occur.

The scene has already been set for a confrontation with the powers-that-be. Which powers was not always obvious. Would it be the hated Romans, the occupiers? Many hoped so.

What was always clear is that this would all come to a head in Jerusalem.

So, at the start of Chapter 21, it’s festival time in Jerusalem. The roads to the city are full of crowds flocking to celebrate the Passover. Just before he enters the city, Jesus warns his followers in the preceding chapter: “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death.” (Matt 20:18) But rather than seeking to avoid that fate by slipping in unnoticed, Jesus makes a hugely public statement by arriving on a donkey, cheered by palm-waving crowds who understood, just as the Pharisees did, that in doing so he was fulfilling the prophet Zechariah’s words about the arrival of a king. (Zech 9:9)

Then, as if that wasn’t enough of a challenge to the powers that be, Jesus turns up the volume. He enters the Temple, overturns the tables of the money changers, and accuses those responsible for running the Temple and making it a den of thieves.

Pandemonium follows. Things are hotting up.

The place is full of the blind and the lame seeking healing, and children making a noise. No wonder the chief priests responsible for the holiest site in Judaism were scandalised. And no wonder Jesus slipped away and slept that night out of the city, in the safety of Bethany.

The next morning, things start again. Walking back to the city, Jesus sees a fig tree by the side of the road and curses it for not bearing fruit. It wasn’t the right season anyway, but Jesus has a thing about bearing fruit.

Then, the day after he created a disturbance in the temple, he goes there again. The chief priests are waiting for him, no doubt furious with him. They challenge his authority to do what he has done. So after telling them one vineyard story he tells them this one, our Gospel reading today.

It’s less of a parable than an allegory.

God is the land-owner, and Israel is his vineyard.

And the tenant farmers are not the Jewish people, as some in the past have said. They are the religious elite, the leaders of the religious establishment – in other words, the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees who Jesus is standing in front of.

The servants in the story who are sent to collect the fruit are the great prophets of Israel's history. And then Jesus hits them with it: He is the son who, in the story, is killed by the tenant farmers.

The religious leaders are not stupid. They get it. They want to arrest him, but they fear the crowd. But we know that Jesus’ fate is sealed. Like the son in the story, he will be taken away and killed. And he has just warned them that "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." (v.43) Like the fig tree, the religious leaders in Jerusalem are in trouble because they don’t produce the fruit of the Kingdom of God. Jesus really cares about fruit.

Now it would be easy for us to be smug at this point. The Jewish religious leaders had failed, and so the vineyard was opened up to us, the followers of Jesus Christ and the people of his Kingdom. Our hands are clean.

Except for this: Jesus really cares about fruitfulness. And, in the story, he says that the vineyard will go to those who produce fruit, who care about the harvest of God’s kingdom. He wants to see fruit. And if we distance ourselves from this story by seeing it as only being about the Pharisees who failed to recognise Jesus, then we miss the point for ourselves.

If we, Christ’s followers, are the vineyard’s new tenants, aren’t we to now produce fruit? To live the life of God’s Kingdom.

Are we harvesting the fruit of witness and compassion, of making the love of God known?

Do we display the Fruit of the Spirit that Paul describes in Galatians 5 – ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’?

John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus describes himself as the true Vine. ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.’ (John 15:5)

What God wants from each of us is the faithfulness that comes from abiding in him – from spending time with him in prayer, in his Word, and in worship and fellowship as members of the body of Christ. He then wants us to spill-out into the community and bear his light and love to others.

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Faithful God help us to serve you faithfully and patiently, watching for you to be revealed in our own lives. We remember the older and retired people here in our church and around us in our lives, and give you thanks for all that they do in our Sunday worship, in our church fellowship and in our communities. Send your Holy Spirit to inspire them to use and share their life experiences with wisdom, humility and gladness.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord God we pray for all who work for peace and unity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war and violence, injustice and inequality, disease, prejudice, poverty and hopelessness and bring healing to the world. We pray especially for those fighting terrorism in

Syria and for peace in the Holy Land. We continue to pray for those who are refugees and seek safety in another country, despite the dangers of the journey.

We pray for the leaders in Europe especially that agreement can be reached on how to cope with so many in a way that is fair and achievable, and that does not lead refugees and migrants into danger and exploitation. Lord Jesus – as a child you were a refugee and were kept safe in another country – help us to hold that example, as a solution to the current crisis is sought.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Father God we pray for our Church, so that each of us will might make use of our individual talents enabling each church group to flourish as a witness to the “One Body” of the church. Help us all to spread the warmth of Your love to everyone we meet and help us to welcome all who come here no matter what their

background, outlook on life, or outward appearance.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Gracious God we pray for the work and service of all care homes and day centres for elderly and sick people, and for those carers who look after family and friends in their own home. Thank you for the many charity organisations who raise money and provide supportive services to help. We pray for all finding their life painful, lonely or uncertain, especially those who are ill or vulnerable. Help them to sense your comfort in times of need and bless their families and carers. We pray for all those who are struggling in their lives. Bring them hope of an end to their sufferings, and a resolution of their difficulties. Show us the best way to help those who suffer, without being intrusive but without simply turning away from their pain either.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Merciful Lord, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love. We remember those who have died and we pray for all whose life is saddened by the death of a loved one - be with them in their loneliness.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Everlasting God we pray for ourselves; as we go from this church today to start the week ahead, we ask that in all we do, we may walk more closely with you at our side safe in the knowledge that your fatherly love and care knows no bounds.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**