

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Bearing Fruit for the Master**

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time/A

October 8, 2017 10:00 AM Is 5:1-7; Phil 4:6-9; **Mt 21:33-43** (Dealing with anger fruitfully would be an effective way of fulfilling the demands of today's parable.)

**“Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.”**

These are fighting words and they are addressed to the chief priests and the elders. When Jesus addresses the chief priests and the elders he is often in battle array; they are his opponents.

**The topic he is bringing up is the fruits necessary for the kingdom of God to endure and spread,** and the concern is wholly practical. **What does God require?** The answer is very simply **that the tenants have to work primarily for God and not for themselves.**

Now this is the very nature of tenant farming. Tenants don't provide the farm or the equipment or the vats or the vines. They simply lease them out, and they have to pay for their lease with produce. Jesus is making the very clear parallel that **we do not produce the talents and the abilities we have in life. God has given them to us, and so we have to work primarily for God, not primarily for ourselves.** In the words of the parable, in the language of the parable, ignoring the contribution to the master is a form of stealing.

Now this is very hard for modern people to grasp. We imagine our lives as ours. We hear that all the time: “It's my life.” Well, did you make it? **Actually our lives are on lease from the maker, and we do owe something.** We imagine that our lives are ours and the fruit of our labor belongs wholly to us. This is not Jesus' understanding. From Jesus' point of view, God's people cannot work primarily for themselves; they **must work and contribute to the greater good, called here the “kingdom of God.”** Tenants are allowed to keep a certain portion of their produce, but only after paying the master what they owe. As I said, modern society does not have this understanding. **In modern society** each person is his or her own master. We could call this

**“individualism.”** In the extreme form it denies that there is a common good and therefore a kingdom of God. **This of course results in a society beset with conflicts, lacking a common goal, and seething with violence.**

We need to look at the violence erupting within our beloved country. It is an all too common reaction to an event such as last Sunday’s **shooting in Las Vegas**, and it’s all too common to say, well, that’s insanity; that man was mad. The problem is **this kind of madness seems to be contagious and growing. And what can be causing it? A very good suspect is anger.** Anger is a brief madness, but with modern automatic weapons a brief madness can do extraordinary harm.

**Now where is this anger coming from? Anger rises from a perception of injustice.** Some perceptions are valid, some are not. But whether or not there is an objective injustice, **anger becomes a toxic force when it is not used as intended, which is to energize the work for justice.** That’s why God put anger into the human emotional repertoire. It’s not an accident. It didn’t evolve by chance. It is a deliberate gift, but it has to be used properly. **Dealing with anger fruitfully would be an effective way of fulfilling the demands of today’s parable.** Dealing with anger requires doing something concrete and practical to actually improve life in society. If we really love our country and our fellow countrymen and countrywomen, **we need to commit ourselves to tackling the many injustices that still prevail among us. That will bear fruit for the master of the vineyard.**