

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

I wonder if this sort of thing still happens today. When I was growing up it was part of friendship. A friend would ask if you want a Hurts Donut. If you liked donuts, you said, "Sure." So your friend would slug you in the arm, smile, and say, "Hurts, don't it?" At that point it would have been best to laugh at your friend for playing a prank on you and forget about it. But rather than ending this silly, break-the-5<sup>th</sup>-Commandment stunt, you would run around asking your friends if they want a Hurts Donut. As soon as everyone quickly shielded their arms and said, "No donuts for me," the game quickly died down and everyone went back to being nice to each other.

Well how about some Friendly Donuts? Not sure? Want to think about it for a minute? Then consider how these Friendly Donuts came about. We are approaching Holy Week at the speed of time. Every week during Lent our Gospel Lessons have been picking up more and more of the flavor of Jesus' suffering and death. Today's Gospel takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday happened two days ago. Yesterday (Monday) Jesus cleared the Temple of the animal sellers and money changers. Today (Tuesday) is a day full of teaching. It's only three days until Jesus dies on the cross to redeem all sinners. He's the one who is offering us some Friendly Donuts. Are you ready for them now? Not yet?

Drill a little deeper into what's happening on this Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus has been in the Temple courts all day so far. Now that it's all cleared out, Jesus is showing everyone what is supposed to take place in his house: teaching. But his enemies don't like any of this one bit. So Jesus teaches the crowd by this parable, knowing that the leaders of the Jews who loathe him are listening. Jesus doesn't want people to loathe him. He wants everyone to believe in him. So with a sense of urgency he offers us the following FRIENDLY DONUTS: **I. Do not Despise My Word** (9-12), **II. Do not Reject My Love** (13-15a,19), **III. Do not Be Crushed by My Judgment** (15b-18).

So what's up with this parable? Let's mine for the message. A vineyard is where you grow grapes. In Bible times wealthy landowners didn't want to get out there and work the vineyard themselves. So they hired tenants. In this case the tenants agreed to give the landowner a portion of the fruit at harvest time, and the landowner agreed that they could keep the rest.

The owner of this vineyard was patient and fair. He allowed a long time for the vines to mature and produce grapes. He was not unjust or unreasonable. He had every right to some of the harvest: the vineyard belonged to him. And he wasn't asking for all of the fruit, just his agreed-upon share.

Do you see how this applies to us? We are currently the Lord's vineyard. He sends his servants to us, our pastors and teachers and elders. Through these servants the Lord is

looking for a harvest of right actions, right words, right attitudes. **DONUT despise God's Word** when it comes. Give the Lord the fruits he has a right to expect. He's actually trying to bless us through his Word. And every time we obey it (produce fruit), we are truly blessed. Let's not refuse and abuse anyone who comes to us with God's Word.

In the parable the tenants not only refused the landowner's rightful request, they also abused the servants who were doing what the owner commanded. The original Greek words give us insight into how cruel the tenants' actions were. The word for 'beat' can mean 'Tear the skin off.' The Greek word for 'wound severely' gives us our word 'traumatize.' And it wasn't just one servant they mistreated, but servant after servant. See how wicked these tenants were? And do you see how patiently the landowner dealt with them? He sent even more respected servants with each new attempt (see Matthew and Mark's accounts). But in their vicious rebellion the tenants killed some of the servants.

Then the landowner asked: <sup>13</sup>*"What shall I do? I know, I will send my son."* Are you tempted to say, "Come on. This isn't how it would play out in real life! No human father who loves his son is going to send him to people who have already shown themselves to be cruel. Would a real father want to take such a chance? Would he say, '*Perhaps they will respect my son?*' No way!" But this parable isn't trying to teach us about human behavior. It wants us to know about our heavenly Father's

behavior. Sending his Son was the only option left. If they wouldn't respect his Son, there would be no hope for them. They would be worthy of judgment.

The Jewish leaders knew Jesus was portraying himself as the son of the landowner. Jesus had already told them he was God's only Son (John 3:16, Luke 10:22). Here Jesus adds words we've heard him use before: <sup>13</sup>*"the son whom I love"* (cf Matthew 3:17).

When the tenants saw the heir, they said, <sup>14</sup>*"Let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours!"* How could these tenants think they would get away with such a crime? Practically speaking, the vineyard was already theirs. The owner was away and had left the land completely in their hands. Perhaps they thought, "The old man hasn't bothered to come and deal with us himself. And he's not come here so far to pay us back for what we've done to him. He's too weak to force us out. So under Jewish law, if the heir doesn't come to claim his land, we can take it."

You already understand the parable, yes? The owner of the vineyard represents God the Father. He had let out his vineyard—the nation of Israel—to the leaders of his people. After he set up the covenant of Sinai as a hedge around his people, he gave them the animal sacrifices to remind them 1) to repent, 2) that he had forgiven them, 3) and that they should bring forth the fruits of repentance. The Lord then stepped back and no longer dealt with Israel directly, as

he had done on Mt. Sinai. But he didn't step back very far. He still sent his servants, the prophets, to ask for fruits of faith and repentance from the leaders of his people. But instead of listening, they treated the servants of God with increasing disdain, even killing some. They apparently sawed Isaiah in two and threw stones at Jeremiah until he died. God sent greater, more respectable servants like John the Baptist, whom the leaders sneered at and killed. Finally he sent his own Son, Jesus the Christ, the heir to the leadership of the nation. And now the leaders reasoned that if they could just get rid of this heir, they'd retain their rights over God's vineyard.

The irony of this parable is that these same people whom Jesus is reaching out to in love by warning them of the dire consequences of their rebellion are the same people who would in three days see to it Jesus was thrown out of the city and killed by the Romans. He could not have given those who hated him a stronger warning (or a more loving and friendly one): **DONUT Reject My Love**. Even though they understood he was reaching out to them, they stubbornly plotted to kill Jesus.

Wicked, wicked leaders! Aren't you glad this parable isn't about us? We could never be so wicked, could we? Lots of religious and political leaders today defy the will of God and conduct themselves as though they were the owners of the vineyard, that it's their church or their

government. But we could never be so wicked, could we?

Actually whenever we refuse to listen to God's servants or his Word, even for a short time, we are committing the same sin as the tenants in the parable. How many times have you said, "Yah, God, I know it's not right," or "I know you'd rather I did it differently, but I want to do it my way," or "I don't like reading the Bible, it's boring, or it makes me mad" or some other excuse for not engaging the Word, or "I'm going to listen only to the part of the sermon I agree with," or "Nobody better come talk to me about my shortcomings." Friends, things like this are the same as bonking the landowner's servant on the head and sending him away without showing any fruits of faith to God (<sup>11</sup>*empty-handed*).

When we do such things, we are in danger of going to the next step, ridiculing God's servants—and the next step after that, killing God's servants. And yet it's easy for our sinful flesh to imagine that we are in no danger of God's justice. And then we hear Jesus teach (v 16): "The tenant farmers will be punished, and the vineyard be given to others." This played out in history. By the time the second and third generation of believers populated the church, most of the members were Gentiles. Yes, there are still some Jews in Christian churches. Some of us may have Jewish blood coursing through our veins. But by and large the kingdom was taken away from those whom God had

previously declared to be his very own nation, and given to others. Devastating judgment!

This same sort of thing is happening to Gentile Christians in our day. Many people who grew up in churches which taught them the truth of God's Word are turning away from those truths. They rarely spend time engaging with the Bible. Satan has succeeded at making the things of this world look more appealing. Because the gospel is always the same—"Your sins are forgiven through Jesus!"—it's easy to make the gospel look boring. But this very gospel is God's powerful tool for creating faith in Jesus and sustaining it. This gospel still being shared by some of Christ's servants. It is still attracting "others" into Christ's Kingdom. Christ is still taking his Kingdom away from those who separate themselves from his Word. Jesus wants everyone to stay in his kingdom. That's why he offers us FRIENDLY DONUTS: DONUT Despise My Word. DONUT Reject My Love. **DONUT Be Crushed by My Judgment.**

God has never kept hidden the punishment he will apply to those who despise his Word. Yet lots of people are shocked when they realize that God plans to judge them for rejecting his loving appeals. We hear a group of them in today's sermon text cry out in response to Jesus' parable: <sup>16</sup>"*May this never be!*" Indeed. This life does not have to end in tragedy for anyone. Here our Savior himself is

reaching out and urgently appealing to us through His FRIENDLY DONUTS. He doesn't want anyone to be crushed by his judgment. Lord, keep us faithful to you.

Let's never be like the builders who considered Jesus unsuitable for what they were building. They refused to see how Jesus fit into their house. So they rejected him. But God had chosen him for the Cornerstone, to square up the building and keep it straight and level (v. 17). Jesus serves as foundation and direction-setter for the Church. Of course, everyone who loves that Jesus has been chosen as Cornerstone finds this a marvelous truth.

But for those who reject Jesus as the Savior, it's like glassware meeting stone. Rejecting Jesus is like tripping and falling on a big stone. When you fall over, you shatter because you're just glass and he's stone. Then there are those who rail against the Redeemer: they ridicule his followers, make it tough on them, try to wipe out his teachings. On them the stone will fall, crushing them to shards. In either case, the stone is not hurt, but the people are. What a warning from our loving Savior to abandon anything that takes us in the opposite direction of him! Jesus wants to save everyone from the fate that befell the leaders of his day. So he urges us: love my Word, take hold of my love. In this you will avoid my judgment on all unbelievers.

Thank you for the warning, Lord. We want what you want.