

### **19.6.22. St Michael's Isaiah 65:1-9; Mark 12:1-12**

I hope you've all been through the Labyrinth – and been thoroughly impressed and energized to share the message of the Bible to your friends and family. A lot of the people who have been through will have been impressed at the work that the children and others have put into it, but will remain unimpressed by the message of Jesus as King, which is that only through his death and resurrection can we receive forgiveness of our sin.

That was the message Jesus was giving the religious authorities when he was here on earth, but they didn't understand and didn't want a Messiah like Jesus – they wanted an earthly ruler.

Their questions about Jesus were – Who is he? Who authorized him to claim that God had sent him to tell them to have faith in God, not the Temple or Caesar?

So Jesus told them the parable in our reading from Mark. The vineyard, like the fig-tree, was a common OT symbol of Israel. They would have understood that the “man” in the

parable was God, that the “vineyard” was the House of Israel and the “missing fruit” was justice and righteousness. It was now time for the owner to express his legal ownership of the vineyard and the fruit it produced.

The owner has rented his vineyard to tenant farmers. The Chief Priests, Elders and Teachers of the Law would have recognized that they were the ones who were answerable to God as the tenants.

The owner sent his servants who demanded the fruit, but were beaten up and finally killed. The Prophets in the OT all had a bad time – ignored and ill-treated – several were killed. Israel would not listen to them.

Because of all this, the owner would have been fully justified in destroying the vineyard because the farmers had failed to look after it.

But, the owner gave them one last chance by sending his Son (Read v6)

Jesus confronted the Jewish authorities with the enormity of what they were about to do. The farmers in the story killed the last messenger, not because they didn't know who he

was and that the whole vineyard was his inheritance, but because they did know. Their motive in killing him was to take for themselves what belonged to him. Although the Jewish authorities knew Jesus was God's Son, sent by God, they planned to kill him so that Israel would honour and give allegiance to them rather than him. They thought that they could have the Temple without God. Their religion camouflaged idolatrous self-worship.

Jesus doesn't say whether the tenants assumed the Father was dead, but they clearly left Him out of their reasoning. They reckoned that God would not judge them, but their punishment fits their crime. Those who kill the Son and throw him out of the vineyard will themselves be thrown out of the vineyard and killed. Read v9 – We are invited to agree with this sentence. And in vv10-12, Jesus uses Ps 118 to say that the stone the builders rejected –that is Jesus himself - is actually the cornerstone – the vital key to unlock God's overflowing love for his people. The sad thing is that the religious leaders completely missed what Jesus was telling them and were even more determined to kill him.

I'm sure you have all been through the Labyrinth by now, or are waiting to go round after the service. As you went/go will you see that most of the story is about what God has done in creation and in sending Jesus to earth to take our sin on himself. Almost none of the tableau glorify the religious leaders and that is something in itself that we as leadership need to remind ourselves about. But, also for our congregations – you need to focus on Jesus and what he has done for us. I think the largest single feature in church today is the massive cross over the Lord's Table and this speaks volumes for our relationship with God through Jesus. The Table is where Jesus instituted the sharing of Holy Communion. He is Lord of all and by his sacrifice on the cross, we can come near to God and receive his love and forgiveness and can learn to love him more and thank him that we have a church in which we can meet together to strengthen and bless each other and remove the selfishness that so easily creeps into our worship. Try and have a conversation with someone/anyone about Jesus today.