

Year A, October 8, 2017  
17 Pentecost (Proper 22)  
Christ Church, Mexia

"A little boy was riding along with his father from New Mexico to Colorado. They were traveling 250 miles to go fishing. Every fifty miles (or so) the excited son asked his father if they were almost there. (Sound familiar?) The father answered that they had quite a distance to travel yet. So, the son waited for a few more minutes and asked his father again. 'Sorry, son, we have another 100 miles yet.' After fifty more miles the son asked again, 'Daddy, am I still going to be four years old when we get there?'" (Hodgin, 17)

Patience – that is one of the things I get from the gospel parable today - God's infinite patience. The land owner created, and I emphasize the word created, the vineyard and went away. Later, the creator sent his messengers to the people who had inhabited the vineyard and prospered from it. The creator just wanted them to live up to the Covenant. But the people weren't interested; they beat, killed and stoned them, several times, until the land owner sent his son, and they killed him as well. It's easy to see the history of God with people revealed in this parable; God created the vineyard, Israel, and left it in the hands of its leaders; his prophets over the centuries were ignored or killed, as finally was God's son. We tend to view this as ancient history, Jesus was addressing the Scribes and Pharisees and we are comfortable. What has it got to do with us? Before I answer, let me tell you one more story:

"A (preacher) and his wife were driving to visit Grandma and Grandpa for Christmas. Their daughter Rachel asked the inevitable question, 'Are we almost there?' The father said, 'No, we are still 150 miles away.' She asked, 'Well, how long is that?' 'Well Rachel, it's about three more hours.' (Rachel) didn't say anything for a few moments as she thought about what three hours must be. She leaned forward from the backseat to the front, making sure she could see her mother's face and said, 'Mommy, is that as long as one of Daddy's sermons?'" (Hodgin, 849)

Well, sit back and relax, this one could be that long today. Just kidding... it may only seem that long.

Maybe what Jesus was referring to in his parable was history, with a few days of prediction added – he had just arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration and has just had his triumphant entry that we

celebrate on Palm Sunday. He was addressing the religious leaders of that time during the week that culminated in his death. Yes, that's history as we know it, but has it been radically different since then? Well, of course, it is you say, "We didn't kill God's prophet's and we certainly didn't kill his son." No, we weren't among those who condemned Jesus in Jerusalem, or physically nailed him to the cross, or even stood in the crowd and watched. But haven't we ignored, maybe persecuted in some ways, prophets in our day – people who have told us things we didn't want to hear – activists, authors, ministers or bishops, scientists – people who have pointed out how we may not be striving to do God's will but rather our own contrary will? Don't we often "blame the messenger" and reject the message out of hand if we don't like it, without giving careful thought to it? Have we truly tried to live like Christ in our lives – falling short at times, but really trying? Have we been good stewards of God's creation and given to God even a small amount of what we have received from God's bounty – whether it be through the church or directly to those in need? The question we have to answer after hearing this parable today is: Are we different - better - than those people of old whom Jesus was addressing in this parable?

And yet God's patience and God's grace is always there. Though we may lose our patience at times, God seems to be like the young woman whose car stalled at a traffic light one day. "She tried to get it started, but nothing would happen. The light turned green, and there she sat, angry and embarrassed, holding up traffic. The car behind her could have gone around, but instead the driver added to her (feelings of embarrassment) by laying on his horn. After another desperate attempt to get the car started, she got out and walked back to the honker. The man rolled down his window in surprise. 'Tell you what,' she said. 'You go start my car, and I'll sit back here and honk the horn for you.'" God has patience with us, and God is not overly concerned about time.

Philips Brooks, clergyman, author and briefly the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts in the 1890s, once said when asked why he seemed to be agitated, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't." God isn't like us – fortunately for us! The people who heard the parable thought the landowner should come and "put those wretches to a miserable death" and give the vineyard to other tenants who would give him what he asked. But God is merciful. And with regard to time - F. B. Meyer explains in his book, *Abraham*, "God has his set times. It is not for us to know them. Indeed, we cannot know them. If God had told Abraham in Haran that he must wait all those years until he

pressed the promised child to his bosom, his heart would have failed him. So in gracious love, the length of the weary years was hidden. And only as they were nearly spent and there were only a few more months to wait, God told him, according to the time of life, 'Sarah shall have a son.' If God told you on the front end how long you would wait to find the fulfillment of your desire or pleasure or dream, you'd lose heart. You'd grow weary in well doing. So would I. But (God) doesn't. (God) just says, 'Wait. I keep my word. I'm in no hurry. In the process of time I'm developing you to be ready for the promise.'

Therefore, be patient like God – to the extent that you can. Just as with the children of the previous stories, 'Are we there yet?' is not the appropriate question. It isn't the destination, but the journey that is important. And though God is infinitely patient and merciful, we should not use those qualities in God to do as we please. Rather we are to build our lives on the cornerstone that is Christ Jesus. Now I understand that transformation, change in our way of thinking or in our beliefs, is difficult to accomplish and can be downright scary. In Paul's letter to the Philippians today, he talks about his early life, but how after encountering Jesus it was very different. I'm different than I was 30-40 years ago, even different than last week in some ways. It's growth; it's the journey. If you hear the Word of God and make it the center of your life, you will change. Thus, in closing, let me leave you with a thought from Oprah, through an acquaintance of hers: "The Will of God will not take you where the Grace of God will not protect you."

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.