

THE LORD AND THE HARVEST

Now as I tell the story, I'm sure that its application in our lives is at least beginning to be clear to you. A vineyard is an image of Israel. When we talk about the owner's message, we think of the Old Testament prophets making their appeal to Israel only to be rejected. The sending of the son is like the sending of God's son—Jesus. He comes to a wicked people and they (we) reject and kill him.

Let me elaborate and give you a little tip for interpreting some parts of the Bible—especially the Old Testament. The nation Israel roughly corresponds to the church of Jesus Christ. Christianity carries the same calling as did Israel, and more of course. So, if Israel is called to be a blessing for all of humanity, as was the case when Father Abraham was called, you and I can assume that we as the church are called to be a blessing for all of humanity. Israel equals the Christian church.

Now, let me give you a second little tip for interpreting the Old Testament for our times. The story of Israel roughly corresponds to the story of your and my spiritual lives—again with the addition of all that Jesus brings. So, as Israel was liberated from bondage in slavery in Egypt, you and I too are delivered from some form of sin slavery and pointless toil and

false gods. We can read the exodus story as a pattern for our own inner lives.

So, we read this story of the vineyard with its messengers who remind us of the Old Testament prophets, and the son who reminds us of Jesus, and we can take it as a picture of the spiritual challenge of First Presbyterian Church and a picture of the spiritual challenge in each of our own souls. God is aching for us and suffering for us and sending his son to us so that we will at long last become fruitful in our lives.

I've told before this story invented by the Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard. The geese in a barnyard gather in a corner of the yard once a week. The biggest goose gets up on a stump and tells his fellow geese how wonderful geese are. Geese are the most intelligent of the barnyard animals. They have fine wings and webbed feet. They're the best looking and so on every week. The problem with the geese is that gathering for a review of how wonderful they are is all they do. They never unfurl those great wings and fly.

The challenge and judgment for you and me could not be more piercing. We're doing the church thing; each of us is doing the Christianity thing. The question is is there any actual behavior in the world that is different. Any fruit?

Someone described Christians as old fashioned deep sea divers. Remember the huge iron helmets and bubbling air hose? There's the head to toe insulated suit and the impressive gloves and tool belt. Christians, like divers, are equipped to work in the most hostile conditions in cold and great pressure. But so often we don't go down deep. Our work looks more like stepping into a bath tub to pull out the plug.

What is this fruit or harvest that God so longs to see in our lives and our church? It's anything that would draw another person into discipleship. It's the victory in our lives of renouncing a sin. It's changing your political party and vote or your business practice, or what you buy, or who you befriend simply because you live Jesus. Fruit is anything that draws a lonely world a bit closer together. It's sharing. It's when you and I become the hands and feet of Jesus and his work goes forward through you and me. The whole enterprise of biblical faith has a supreme point. The point is that we bear fruit.

I invite you to use the time we spend passing the bread and cup to ponder the question of fruit in your own life. You know, this meal is one of God's ways to make us fruitful disciples. He's getting us ready here. What's he getting you ready for in your life? My life?

The Kingdom of God—so we're told today—is the longing of God for results, for something to show for all our activity. So much does God yearn for fruitfulness that he would send his son to die rather than settle for fruitlessness from you and me.

Let's each of us leave this place intent on making a real difference in this world that God so loves.