

SERMON

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Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, IL

October 4, 2026 - Pentecost 19, A, 2026 (Proper 22)

Isaiah 5:1-7 Psalm 0:7-19 Philippians 3:4b-14 Matthew 21:33-46

“It’s my body..... It’s my life.”

Words we sometimes hear from people being admonished about their behavior-- teenagers as well as older adults.

“Christ Jesus has made me HIS OWN,”

we heard in today’s Epistle from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. (3:12a)

He wrote similar things to the church in Corinth:

“Do you not know.... that you are NOT YOUR OWN? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Human beings have a history of difficulty with the idea

- that they are NOT their own.

It is the story of

- Adam and Eve,

- the people of Noah’s day,

- and then, again and again, the story of the children of Israel.

And the result of such God-denying thinking is most often the same:

- Brokenness.

- Heartbreak.

- Tragedy.
- The good creation spoiled and perverted.

Thinking we are all on our own--

- and not responsible to anyone else,
- ignoring that we have an owner,
- is a tragic spiritual mistake that is the source of endless misery,
- both in everyday life and, more importantly, in our life with God.

It is a mistake that devastates both body and soul....

In recent Sundays, we have been reminded

- that the vineyard is used as a picture
- of God's chosen people in the Holy Scriptures.
- In the Old Testament, it represents Israel.
- In the New, the Church--
- whose members are connected to Christ Jesus,
- the one true Israelite,
- like branches to the vine,
- branches which are expected to bear fruit.

So it is a picture also of US....The parable Jesus tells

- about the rebellion in the vineyard
- is also OUR story.

By NATURE we too like to act

- as though we are owners when we are only tenants.

Parables are stories

- with a **word-hook**
- that has the purpose of **reeling in** people into the kingdom of God
- as they recognize how its truth applies to them.....

Their purpose is to help and save those who hear them.....

- So they are a very special form of communication
- to those who have ears, but by nature have big trouble hearing....

While heartbreak comes

- to those who refuse to recognize WHOSE they really are,
- a deep happiness is in store
- for those who understand that they own nothing....
- including themselves,

The vineyard itself was created to be a HAPPY place

- when used as intended,
- producing delicious grapes
- that would be used for wine
- for happy celebrations like weddings.

Like the water turned into the best of wine by Jesus

- at the wedding of Cana
- so also, to be able to say “Christ Jesus has made me His own”
- will be words brimming over
- with hope and deep, eternal joy.

So how are WE doing here in the vineyard--

- especially with our understanding about whose we are--
- OUR understanding of whether we are tenants or owners.

It IS important to take stock of ourselves--

- to look into the mirror.....

If we give our lives any serious thought at all,

- it will soon be clear
- that we spend too much of our time and energy
- making priorities of what is in reality of little ultimate importance.

When we do come to the end of life,

- it will finally be clear that WE OWN NOTHING AT ALL.

“.... for we brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out of this world.”- 1 Timothy 6:7

- as Paul wrote to young Timothy/
- So why would any spiritually sane person
- allow some THING-- any THING--
- to absorb their short time on earth,

- so that things of eternal importance
- are minimized or ignored completely.

FAITH ALONE will remain--

- and it's TOTAL CONTENT
- will be the TREASURE of precious promises
- which have been given us by undeserved grace--
- promises that we could NEVER make to ourselves
- by pretending we are all on our own....

Think about the list of the fruits of the Spirit,

- our loving God intends to be harvested in every believers' life.

They are:

- love,
- joy,
- peace
- patience,
- kindness,
- goodness,
- faithfulness,
- gentleness,
- self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Are we taking time to cultivate such fruits in the vineyard of our lives?

- It IS easy to concentrate on other priorities, isn't it?.....
- THINGS that seem more important.

But there is some very good news for us

- who so easily start choosing wrong priorities
- in the vineyard.
- The owner of the vineyard is amazingly patient,
- far beyond anything we might expect him to be.

Let's look at him more closely with a view toward that patience.

The tenants did nothing to create the vineyard:

- HE dug it on that fertile hill
- and cleared it of stones
- and planted it with choice vines
- and built a watchtower in it
- and hewed out the wine vat.

All that he expected in return was the portion that was rightfully his own--

- the acknowledgement of his ownership.

When the tenants became greedy

- and refused him his rightful dues,
- he patiently sent messengers AGAIN AND AGAIN.

- The owner PATIENTLY endured his servants being treated terribly,
- even killed....

- And, finally he sent his own beloved son to the vineyard.

STILL the tenants refused to change their ways.

- They hardened their hearts.
- They killed the son.....

“Now what will he do to those tenants?”

Jesus asks. Those first hearing this parable answered,

“He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

With those words they pronounced condemnation upon themselves.

- After rejecting and killing the prophets that God had sent,
- the very Son of God would be killed on His visit among them....

And in telling this parable,

- Jesus is making it again clear
- that He knows what is in store for Him--
- and yet HE willingly,
- with patient determination,
- continued His ministry,
- even when He knew the cost would be rejection

- and horrible agony for Himself.

Even then, notice that the judgment Jesus announces

- sounds less harsh than their own.

- He does NOT mention their being put to death.

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”

- a prediction of the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles.....

We know how the story goes on.

God’s patience did not come to an end after all.

St. Paul writes,

“God was in Christ reconciling the world (Jew and Gentile) to Himself.” (2 Corinthians 5:19)

The amazing, mind-boggling message that accompanies the death of God’s beloved Son finally ends like this:

“The owner of the vineyard has ADOPTED US as his own dear children-- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ!”

We have no more need for rebellion and grabby-ness!

- The owner, in love, has given us

- His whole kingdom for our inheritance.

We can refuse to believe it.

We can reject His love--

- and try to enjoy the fruits of all He has given

- apart from that relationship,
- without loving Him in return.

We can stick to our own self-centered ways.

- His way is not to force us.

But are we too then not in danger

- also in our day
- of the vineyard being given to others?

Now servants of the New Covenant are coming to us with His messages--

- pleading with us,
- urgently inviting us
- to understand and believe.

The owner loves us, in spite of everything--

- and yearns for our happiness here in this beautiful vineyard--
- the fulfillment that comes with recognizing whose we truly are,
- not just tenants now, but children and heirs.

Then our responsibilities in the vineyard

- will no longer be a matter of things we “ought” to do--
- something to put off as long as possible.

Instead offering our Father-owner His due

- will be a matter of deepest privilege and purpose and joy.

In fact, we will find ourselves feeling

- that at last we have found the secret of life itself,
- life that is meaningful and fulfilling, “abundant”
- the secret of becoming what God Himself has created and redeemed us to be.

And with Saint Paul we will be able to declare

- that our BEING OWNED is something to be proclaimed with
- hope
- and confidence
- and joy--
- beyond anything we could ever achieve
- by pretending to be owners instead.

“Christ Jesus has made ME His own!”

For St. Paul that realization came as a kind of wake up call.

Before the Risen Lord met Paul,

- who was then Saul
- on the road to Damascus,
- he had definite goals in life,
- and was successful.

But suddenly he was awakened,

- sort of from a deep sleep,
- shaken and kicked out of bed.

Now he counted his past successes as rubbish,

- compared to
- a life as Christ's own.

He changed his goals,

- completely
- to what was truly important
- to what was so much better than what had seemed like success--
- to what is eternal.

That same risen Lord Jesus

- who met Paul on the road to Damascus
- also has come to meet us today,
- as He as promised to those who gather in His name,
- however small their number.

He speaks to us in His parable,

- and through the words of His apostle.

He brings to us the fruits of all that He achieved

- by His faithful work as God's beloved Son for us all--
- including complete forgiveness for ALL those times

- we have acted as though we were God.

So don't be afraid to hear what He would tell you,

- as difficult as it is for you by nature..

You are not your own. I am not my own.

- But you have every reason to want to know whose you truly are

- by unimaginable grace.

Don't be afraid to give yourself away

- into the arms of a waiting Father,

- who is one with our patient, now risen, Savior.

You literally have nothing of your own to lose.