

Ordinary 27A - October 7-8, 2017

A friend of journalist David Halberstam was planning a visit to Japan. It would be his first visit, and he was a little anxious because he couldn't speak Japanese. How would he communicate with the people he came in contact with? Since most taxi drivers do not speak English, someone suggested that it might be a good idea to carry with him something bearing the name of the hotel at which he would be staying written in Japanese. That was exactly what he did.

As soon as he arrived in Japan he picked up a box of matches bearing the name and address of his hotel. Then he went sightseeing. Afterwards he got into a taxi and did as the friend suggested, he took the box of matches out of his pocket to show the driver where he wanted to go. There were a few awkward moments before the driver understood. Finally his face lit up. Quickly they sped away. Half an hour later, the taxi came to a screeching halt. The driver turned and beamed at his passenger, pointing out the window. There was only one problem. They had stopped, not in front of a hotel, but a match factory!

Have you ever had an experience like that? Someone will say something and for whatever reason you do not understand. It's as if they were speaking a foreign language. You want to go back to the hotel and instead find yourself in front of a match factory.

There were times when Jesus tried to communicate profound truths to those around him and they acted as if he were from Mars. He would say something and he could watch their eyes glaze over. Particularly he had difficulty getting through to the religious officials of his day. They wanted nothing to do with him or his teachings. They condemned him without even listening to him. They were so sure of themselves and their standing in the community that they were impervious to everything he did or said.

So I do imagine that Jesus uses the image of a vineyard now for the same reason the prophets did before him:

- Because they are powerful examples of intentional gift passed on.

- Because vineyards do not happen over night, but are the results of many, many years of cultivation and care. In this case, by God's Own Hand.
- And because they are symbols of abundance where God's gift and our human hands and hearts join together to produce delicious things which sustain and enhance our lives.

Oh, we hear the parable Jesus offers now and we shake our heads, unable to imagine how the tenants forgot all of this and how their hearts could have become so callous or so greedy that they would kill first the messengers and then the son himself. And yet we also know that Jesus' words today are prophecy. That those who heard Jesus speak these words the first time would, in a matter of days, find themselves behaving just as those tenants did. For they, too, had somehow forgotten the gift and privilege of it all. (*The Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt*)

A man hurried to the church door one Sunday afternoon and said, "Is the service over?" An usher who had grasped the implications of the minister's words that day said, "The worship is over, but the service is only beginning."

Certainly it is a judgment against us when we no longer make ourselves useful to our heavenly Father.

With keen insight, Jesus portrays us sinners as God's tenants of his vineyard. We see what a great privilege it is to be a tenant of God, and have all this given to us. The vineyard was a great one. They had everything they needed - hedge, winepress, and the tower - which would have made it comparatively easy for those tenants and could have made possible their doing a very good job.

It's good to know that God not only gives us certain tasks to accomplish in our life-time, but he also provides for us the means to get them done. In what a generous vineyard our lives are set! (by Jerry L. Schmalenberger from *When Christians Quarrel*, CSS Publishing Co., Inc.)