

The Master's Absurd Patience

Scripture Reading — Mark 12:1-12

“He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.”
—Mark 12:5—

This parable—usually called “The Parable of the Tenants”—is really misnamed. The story is not mainly about the tenants but about the absurd patience of a loving God.

The parable is an adaptation of God’s picture of his people in Isaiah 5:1-7. In Isaiah the vineyard is identified with Israel, whom God punished for a time by sending them off to exile. In Jesus’ parable the vineyard also represents God’s people, the Jews (now returned from exile). And their leaders know Jesus is talking about them (v. 12).

In Jewish storytelling, incidents were often repeated three times to indicate the completion of an episode. Three servants are sent to the tenants to collect fruit, but the first two are abused and the third is killed. The crowd likely expects the parable to end with that. So the next words come as a surprise: “He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.” Jesus is talking about the many prophets God sent to his people in the past, who would not listen but would abuse his messengers. What absurd patience God had!

The story continues by saying the landlord sends his own beloved son to express his great care for his vineyard. But in rebellion the tenants reject and kill him too. In the end God’s grace triumphs as he gives the vineyard to others (who become the church of Christ).

As God’s people today, are we faithful in serving our Lord?

Prayer

Father, we praise you for your patience with us. May we willingly serve, offering the firstfruits of our lives. Amen.

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