

October 8th 2017

Scripture:

Psalm 118:14-29

Matthew 21:33-46

“He sent, He sent, He sent.”

Today and tomorrow ---- Thanksgiving Sunday and Thanksgiving Day -----
----- are days on the secular calendar but with a distinctly Christian
flavour.

As Christians we give thanks in a much more focused and specific way ---
we aren't just randomly thankful ----- for friends and family and food ---
good times.

Instead we are specifically thankful ----- thankful to God for providing for us
--- friends --- family --- and food --- and so much more as well.

That's why we are here after all ---- and not sleeping in or just lounging
around ---- although starting at 10 as we do here at St. Andrew's ---- still
provides the opportunity to sleep in ---- especially if you don't have young
children --- but I digress.

Back to ----- Thanks giving.

Giving thanks to God who provides all that we have.

In Matthew's gospel today we have a prime example of the giving ----
gracious nature of God.

The parable of the tenants ---- is one of only a few parables that appear in all
three synoptic Gospels --- the gospels of Matthew ---- Mark --- and Luke.

The Good Samaritan for example only appears in Luke's Gospel --- but this
--- the parable of the tenants appears in 3.

Which is crucial if you think about it ----- because what this says is that 3
gospel writers found this parable essential for understanding the gospel.

And what it also says --- is that this parable goes deeper and speaks to a more profound and fundamental gospel truth than just ----- “love your neighbour” --- from the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And at it's core the profound truth of the parable of the tenants in Matthew's gospel today ----- is that God continually provides and God continually sends us what we need ---- the guidance and direction that we so desperately need in a world as messed up as ours is.

The parable of the tenants is all about the reality of God's love for us --- in that He continually provides for us --- by sending us messengers and messages to steer us in life.

The problem with the tenants in the parable is that they had long since given up on believing that they were ever in need of any kind of direction.

Practically speaking they had decided that they could run the vineyard without any direction or input from the owner.

They were doing just fine on their own --- thank you very much.

Every time the landowner tries to direct them ----- they kill the messenger --- they are just fine on their own --- or so they think.

Their self-certainty was so great that they felt they needed no direction at all --- they had all the answers --- so they do away with anyone who offers anything other than what they want to hear.

Indeed ----- they were so certain they had it all figured out that they felt that they could literally kill anyone who might suggest that they had something else they needed to do in addition to what they were already doing.

“Us --- oh no ----- we're doing just fine here ----- should anyone come along and suggest otherwise ---- well we'll just have to kill them --- gut them ----- --- for suggesting otherwise won't we.” ----- that's essentially their attitude -- - they don't need anything but themselves.

In a sense ---- this parable is all about the rejection of messengers and therefore also the rejection of a message.

Israel had been rejecting God's messengers and God's message for sometime.

Israel had lost its ability not only to give thanks to God --- but also to even hear anything that God had to say.

Thought of this way ----- the first servants represent the prophets ----- and the failure of the people of Israel to listen to them --- them ---- Jeremiah ---- Amos --- and others.

And then ---- if we carry on this way ---- the second round of servants represents someone like say John the Baptist --- and the failure of Israel to hear John's message of repentance and preparation for the arrival of the King --- the Christ.

And then of course most obviously ---- the son of the landowner represents the Son of God ---- who like the previous round of messengers was also killed.

Carrying on in this kind of allegorical reading ----- the tenants --- represent the authorities at the time of Christ ----- a kind of self-serving interpretation of the will of God.

And when we only ever have a self-serving interpretation of the will of God ----- when we only agree to do what God wants us to do when it is in line with what we wish to do ---- when we have that kind of self-serving attitude ----- we end up unable to see Jesus as the kingdom's gracious cornerstone --- precisely because we ourselves are the cornerstone ----- the centre around which everything else exists.

And that is precisely why Jesus quotes Psalm 118 --- "the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone..."

When we are so self certain of the will of God that we reject any other guidance that God sends to us that doesn't directly align with what we think ----- we are most certainly headed for danger.

So what God is saying here --- with these tenants and this gracious landowner?

On the one hand we have this gracious landowner ---- who sends representatives ----- over and over again.

And on the other we have this group of people who kill them every time they appear.

A calm loving master ---- and a rebellious --- leave us alone group of employees.

Part of what God saying here is that if He sends us something ---- at the very least we need to consider it.

Put another way --- we cannot be selective about what messages from God we wish to receive.

Receiving only those messages that go along with what we want and what we think is not any kind of faithfulness at all.

If we act like this we just might reject that which is the very cornerstone of what God desires to do with and for us --- and of course this is exactly what happened at the time of Christ ----- selective reception --- a pick and choose faithfulness.

Thankfully the beauty of God is that He is virtually relentless ----- He sends ---- and He sends ----- and He sends ---- indeed He sends ---- and He sends - --- and He sends ---- and then He re-sends ---- and He re-sends --- and He re-sends ---- precisely because he knows how proud and how stubborn we are.

More than one theologian has summarized the Old testament saying it's the story of God sending and speaking the people messing up --- God sending speaking and forgiving the people messing up ---- God sending speaking and forgiving the people messing up --- over and over and over again.

Anyone here ever met a stubborn person ----- we've all met them --- but we also hardly ever see ourselves as stubborn ---- you do the math on that one -- -- we're all stubborn given the right topic or concern – we all have defaults the change very little over time ---- that's called stubborn --- or commitment --- because I'm not stubborn I'm committed.

Thankfully God knows this ----- that we are al stubborn ----- and so over and over and over again He sends us all that we need.

The gospel is God's unconditional promise that the ultimate destiny of creation is good.

The gospel is God's unconditional promise ----- made in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ ---- that that the ultimate destiny of creation and the human condition ----- is good.

The gospel today doesn't end with the landowner failing to send another messenger --- our reading kind of ends that way but the gospel --- the greater narrative that envelopes our passage doesn't stop there.

The gospel goes on with another parable ----- God sending another message to His people.

Matthew 22 --- right after our passage is another parable --- another message ---- another servant headed out into the vineyard with the message of God's saving love.

He sent --- He sent ----- He sent --- is precisely what the landowner did in our passage today ---- because that is precisely what God does and then some.

Right after this passage --- all about sending ---- God sends again.

Because that is precisely what God does --- He sends us ---- He reaches out - -- He gives --- He provides ----- exactly what we need when we need it.

Unfortunately we sometimes --- often even ----- reject Him ---- it --- His message and His messengers.

Sometimes we even get so self-certain ----- that we reject everyone and everything He sends --- including the very cornerstone of His great and saving will.

Thankfully God doesn't stop there --- instead He simply sends and sends and re-sends again --- almost relentlessly ---- certainly with far more stamina and grace than we ever have.

When the culture rejected Jesus --- killed him --- the cross ---- God brought Him back around again and re-sent Him ---- the resurrection.

And God will re-send Him again ---- the next coming.

He sent --- we rejected --- the cross.

He re-sent ---- the resurrection ---- but again we were uncertain ---- so rejection again.

He will sent again --- the end of time as we know it --- hopefully we won't blow it again as we did the first two times ----- we do seem to be getting better ---- hopefully third time is a charm.

The more certain we are of ourselves ---- the less likely we are open to God.

“We don't need Him” ----- the tenants said today in Matthew's gospel when the first messenger is sent.

And then it's ----- “We don't need them either.” ----- after the landowner tries again.

And then a third time it's ---- “we don't need him either.”

They were so self assured --- so self-confident of just what they needed that in the end they ended up rejecting the very cornerstone --- the most critical piece of the puzzle ---- the piece around which all others find their meaning purpose and reason for being --- the Son.

The gospel is God's unconditional promise --- a promise made in the death and resurrection of Jesus ----- that the ultimate destiny and purpose and outcome of creation ----- including the human condition --- is good.

But sometimes we push away ---- reject ---- let pass by ---- God's directives --- His messengers and messages.

Maybe you've heard the story of the man who felt totally abandoned by God after the massive flood in his hometown.

His house --- down in the valley --- next to the river ---- was one of the first to be consumed by the waters ----- as the whole town was flooded.

And so the man --- a devout Christian ---- elder and leader in the community ----- standing on his rooftop --- house totally consumed by the flood waters ---- prayed to God fervently --- "Lord come rescue me ---- save me -- ----- don't leave me here ---- save me Lord --- save me."

And this went on for days --- day after day after day --- he stood on his rooftop --- with no where else to go ---- water as far as the eye could see.

And day after day his cry was the same --- "Lord save me --- save me. ----- Don't forget about me Lord --- come ---- rescue me Lord."

But the Lord never came --- or so he thought.

One day a man in a canoe.

Another day a man in a small tin boat.

The next day it was a dinghy --- a blow up raft kind of thing.

And this too went on for days ---- as members of the community floated by - ----- another canoe --- another tin boat --- and another dinghy.

And still the man prayed ---- "Lord save me---- Lord save me."

Finally after the subtle approach hadn't worked for so long.

The Lord replied to the man ----- "I'm trying to save you ---- who do you think these people are in the boats --- I've already come in 3 canoes --- 4 tin boats --- 3 wooden boats and a half a dozen blow up dinghy's to try to save you ---- but every time you've rejected me."

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

The cornerstone ----- the relief and rescue efforts in this mans town were tin boats and dinghy's.

But this man had other ideas ----- the God he knew would come in a yacht or a houseboat --- or a great cigarette boat ----- you know the long skinny fast ones ----- with flashy colours.

He --- God sent ----- and He sent --- and He sent ----- and He sent --- and He sent ---- and He even re-sent.

But each and every time the man rejected.

He had a self serving interpretation of God's will --- "God will save me --- rescue me ----- provide for me --- in a certain way ---- and it won't be a tin boat or a blow up dinghy."

Without even realizing it ---- he kept rejecting God's messengers and God's message.

Without even realizing it he rejected the very cornerstone of God's way.

He refused to consider that God just might come in the most unexpected of ways.

He never considered that God doesn't often come as we wish He would ----- and instead comes as He so chooses.

The truth is ----- God always sends us the messenger ---- the message ----- the resources ---- the strength ----- the way ---- everything we could ever need and then some.

He sends ---- He sends ---- He sends --- as Matthew's gospel drives home today.

And even when the people say --- as they did in verse 41----- "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end." ----- He doesn't.

God doesn't necessarily bring wretches to a wretched end.

Sometimes that's what we want -----“Them ----- those people who stole all those young girls only to sell them into prostitution ----- they ---- those wretches should be brought to a wretched end.”

“Him --- that guy who opened fire on an unsuspecting crowd ----- him --- that wretch should be brought to a wretched end.”

Sometimes we feel that way ---- but God --- well He is quick to forgive ---- and so He sends --- and He sends --- and He sends again ---- over and over and over again ----- inviting us into His loving and saving presence.

That's the very nature of the gospel ----- God sending ---- God coming --- to save ----- and to rescue us.

That's why we give thanks.

Not because everything is always good and we always feel thankful ----- but because of the unconditional promise that it all ends well.

This is how we can give thanks in the face of atrocities like Las Vegas.

This is how we can give thanks in the face of atrocities like the shooting of innocent people gathered in a church for Bible study.

This is how we can give thanks in the face of grotesque acts like stealing young girls only to force them into lives of subservient suffering and abuse.

If we only ever have a self-serving interpretation of God's will --- things look grim and sad and dark and horrible --- because we are stubborn and we kind of like wretched people brought to wretchedness.

And further if we only ever have a self-serving --- self defined --- self-generated interpretation of God's will ----- we will be totally unable to see Jesus as the kingdom's gracious cornerstone --- precisely because he doesn't do things the way we would or the way we would like to see them done.

Jesus said ----- “My grace is sufficient for you ----- for my power is made perfect in weakness.” --- 2nd Corinthians 12:9.

“My grace is sufficient for you ----- for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

His grace is sufficient --- even when we think it's lacking ---- or absent --- or too weak ---- it is always sufficient.

And it is made perfect in weakness ---- it is made perfect in ways and people we never thought possible.

We can easily lose our sense of awe in God --- a few bad things happen and we begin question ---- and this isn't necessarily a bad thing --- because we care ---- and we're hurt --- and confused ---- and feel for all those that suffer.

But lose heart we can't.

Why --- because ----

God provides.

God sends.

Because His grace is sufficient.

Because the promise is unconditional.

Because all will be well.

And not just abstractly --- but concretely.

And so we are enabled and can put our best foot forward ---- and say --- “Thank You God” ----- even when it can be tough to --- in light of what we see --- hear --- and read about.

Thanks giving ---- isn't just about a day.

It's about a disposition ---- an orientation of the heart.

He sends ----- and we give thanks.

He sends ----- and we give thanks.

Ugly things happen ---- beautiful things happen --- grotesque things sometimes even happen ----- and then joyful life giving things happen too.

And He sends ----- and we give thanks.

Strange things happen --- curious things happen --- uplifting and edifying things happen --- confusing things happen --- uncertain --- and then very certain things happen.

He sends ----- He provides ---- and we give thanks.

That's the rhythm of our lives --- that's the rhythm of faith.

God provides ---- not always in ways that are intelligible to us --- not always in ways with which we agree --- but God provides ----- and we give thanks.

Self certainty leaves no room for wonder awe --- and appreciation.

The gospel is God's unconditional promise that it ends well.

And so we give thanks.

Thanks for the great I am ----- the God of the burning bush ---- the God of Abraham --- Isaac and Jacob --- the God of each and every person here today.

The one true and living God.

For He is with us forever.

And He is for us forever.

And He isn't finished yet.

The great love story of the creator and His creation isn't over yet by a long stretch.

As we heard in our opening Psalm in the call to worship ----- His faithfulness continues through all generations.

You can't measure a generation ---- in one culture a generation is 50 years in another it's 80 in another it's closer to 30 or 40 years --- in another still it's closer to 100 years ----- it cannot be measured ---- or standardized.

So it is with God's love --- immeasurable --- not standardized ---- fixed or limited.

Instead it continues through all generations ----- in other words it continues forever.

He gives it --- He gives it --- He gives it ---- endlessly.

That's what we celebrate and give thanks for today.

God's endless love for us --- messed up --- sloppy ---- inconsistent--- all over the place as we are ---- God loves us --- God loves us ---- God loves us ----- and always will.

And so we give thanks.

And so we give thanks.

And so we give thanks.

Amen.