

Pentecost 16A
 October 2, 2011
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St Stephen's San Jose
 Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 The Decalogue
 Psalm 19
 Philippians 3:4b-14 I press on toward the goal.
 Matthew 21:33-46 The parable of the wicked tenants

The key for me into the meaning of our readings today is Matt 7:20, where Jesus says that "The way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced."

In Exodus, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. These rules are not to be a checklist for a good life. They are more like a description of the fruit we should expect to produce when we decide to live our lives always looking to please God. The Ten Commandments are not meant to say that if you meet these rules, you earn your way into God's Kingdom. It is more the other way around. When we choose to live as residents of God's Kingdom, that is what our life will look like.

Through Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells another parable to the Jewish leaders, in response to their challenge to him about naming the source of his authority. Remember that last week we read the parable of the two sons (one who said he would help his father and did not, and the second son who said he would not help his father, but changed his mind and helped). Today is the parable of the wicked tenants; and it uses the imagery of a vineyard.

Through this parable Jesus warns that Israel has rejected the prophets that God has sent, and now they are rejecting God's own son. Jesus warns that God will take the kingdom of God away from them and give it to people who will produce the "fruits" God expects to see.

The point to these readings is that producing good fruits in our life is a sign of our right relationship with God. The vineyard is our life, assigned to us by God. The wicked tenants didn't show any fruit of belonging to God. They were greedy, and did not honor life. This is a wakeup call from Jesus for all of us to pay attention to what our life is producing. I don't think promotions at work count, or working the longest hours of anyone in our department count, or making the highest wage in our group count; although how we use those resources would count as a sign of our relationship with God. So what can we do to assure that we have accomplished what God wants to see in our life?

Paul describes (3:12), "Not that I have already obtained this (becoming like Christ) or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." Paul is telling us that we never arrive during this life. Our right attitude is **to be striving** – to press on toward the goal. God is looking for striving that shows our commitment, and striving that reflects our faith.

There is a tension built into what Paul says in Romans versus what he says here in Philippians. Paul challenges us in Romans to "be what we are". We are saved, but we need to constantly keep working toward our salvation. "Be what we are." Our faith life

should be based on an attitude of pressing on toward the goal. Our faith life is not an event; it is a process.

So how do we press on toward the goal? How do we ‘be who we are?’ Let’s check in on three elements from Cursillo we are called to do:

Piety; deepening our commitment to Christ through meditation on him, and a prayer life.
Meditation – On “I am God’s vineyard.”

Prayer life – “On waking, walking into work, starting a tense phone call, walking into the house at the end of the workday, lying down to sleep.

Study; through reading the Bible (You Version), SS Bible Study-next Revelation
Sunday School, Small groups and Adult Education

Action; Ministry and Mission

Ministry – Spending moments thinking, talking about, how we can be more effective helping each other, and helping people outside this community.

Extra Sunday School supplies in the closet going to Tanzania;

Polio vaccines for Sudan students financed by SS;

Education for 540 Tanzanian children financed by ECR last year

Mission – finding ways to tell others about Christ; preschool!! Witnessing through
Ministry.

Warm, dry clothing for the homeless – motivated by wanting to model the mind of Jesus

You and I have been called together by God as a faith community and as individuals, to the process of growing in our commitment to Christ, in our study and in our action. If the passion is gone – expand or change to something new. If questions arise – talk them over with Christian friends. Do not let yourself become complacent in your faith. You and I are called to share ideas, to make our ideas become reality through our time and talents and money. We are called through these works to bear good fruit. Let’s press on together toward that goal. You are God’s vineyard.

Let us pray. Lord God, we give you thanks for the blessings of this vineyard, SS in the Field, in which we grow and flourish as your children, striving through our faith to accomplish the works you desire of us. Inspire our ideas, guide our decisions, and bless our works, that they would all be acceptable to you. In Christ’s Name we pray. Amen.