

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:7-15

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-36

10/08/2023

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew,

[Jesus said to the people:] 33“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ 39So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” 42Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? 43Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from

you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. 44The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.” 45When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

### **Paul's Testimony**

I have shared this story before, but it's been a while. And since the retreat and Gathering of the Ministerium, it's been on my mind. When I searched to find it in my older sermons I was surprised to find out that it was this exact set of lessons! So, if you don't like this one, blame the Holy Spirit!

I don't remember my baptism but at sometime in the month of September of 1987 I was baptized at First English Lutheran Church in Wheeling, WV. It was the church my mom had grown up in, it was the church my parents were married in, and eventually it would become the location for my sister's, brother's and my own wedding. It was where I was confirmed, and it was where I was ordained.

Like most young children I didn't enjoy church, especially that long time where we stood before we got the wine and the bread when the pastor did all that talking behind the altar, but it became a place where I was safe. During confirmation I was able to be someone else, Pastor Tim was my nickname and it was the one place that I felt where I could be good at

something. My bad grades didn't matter in church, my lack of skill in sports didn't matter either. I could remember the answers to the questions in church for some unknown reason and when I started going to the week long camp in Cowen, WV for Camp Luther my fate was sealed. I didn't know it then, but God had a plan. In high school I met Dave Etling, a Younglife leader who showed me that faith was more than just the time or the one hour a week that we spent at church on Sunday. The summer after my sophomore year of high school was an important one though, God was busy. It began in June, at Camp Luther. During the last day of class the Bishop of the WV-WMD Synod made his "sell" on becoming a pastor. Every year he would ask the group of high school students to think long and hard about the possibility that they might be called to ministry. But interestingly, this year he told the class that any of us could be pastors, in fact, some in that very room should think about it, and he lifted up the names of specific friends. People like Tim Crummitt he said... I don't know about you, but when the Bishop says my name my first reaction was to assume I did something wrong. I remember mentally jumping at my name. ME?! I'm not sure I was even paying attention when he said my name, sitting up straight when my friends turned to look at me. Well Bishops have been wrong before, so I went home confused. In July I went to Younglife camp and kept Dave Etling up till 3:30am one night talking about faith and religion. I finished that summer by having a weekly chess game with Dave where the conversation would always take the same turn: "I want to do something in the church, but I can't be a pastor! What about a youth minister? Can you imagine me writing a sermon every week, Dave?!" I would ask.

And so I was in limbo for the next year as it became increasingly clear that I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but the church seemed important. The next summer, at Camp Luther things got strange. People kept telling me to be a pastor. And this wasn't just other pastors, I'm talking counselors, "normal" adults, I thought. And then my friends started saying it too, other teenagers at camp started suggesting it. Had the entire camp lost its mind?

But then it happened... On a Friday evening service in the bullpen while we sang "*Here I Am, Lord*" something weird happened. I can't quite put into words the experience, but somehow I distinctly remember knowing that God was calling me to be a pastor. God called me, spoke in some way that was speaking without words... I was called. During the sharing of the peace I told some counselors with tears in my eyes what had happened, an experience I might add is completely beyond the norm for the pragmatic and practical person that I am. While the road has been long and challenging and consists of many other chapters between that moment and when I showed up at your door seven years ago, this is the brunt of it, my testimony if you will. A boy with nowhere to go, a place where he didn't feel safe until he found himself at the church.

We've actually heard a few testimonies today. Mine was the second, our first was in the Philippians reading. Paul writes:

*"If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,*

*blameless.7Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>*

Paul’s testimony is a little bit shorter than mine, but infinitely more interesting. Let me explain, in these few verses Paul tells us that he had it all; it didn’t get any better for a Jew than what Paul had. He was circumcised on the correct day according to the law, he had every box of faith checked. He was a Jew from Israel, descendant from the tribe of Benjamin, Jacob’s youngest son. A “Hebrew born of Hebrews” no mixing in his blood, he followed the law completely, he was a pious Pharisee! Nobody could have considered themselves more zealous for the Lord. And yet, he writes, he considers it all a loss compared to what Jesus Christ has done. The NRSV translates it as “loss” and some do a better job with “rubbish” but I’ll be honest, Paul’s using a much stronger language. He considers his legacy as crap compared to the work of Jesus Christ. Paul’s cussing! That’s how strongly he wants the Philippians to see what he believes.

Dr. Peterson, my NT professor, explained this passage to us in the following way: When we hear the word testimony or witness we often think of hearing the story of some horrible sinner who turns their life around and finds the Lord. Right? We hear about someone like a drug addict who after hitting rock bottom somehow finds faith and turns their life around. We love these stories, but as Dr. Peterson and Paul would argue, they shouldn’t be very convincing conversion stories.

Why? Well, Dr. Peterson and Paul would argue, of course they found God. It’s easier to choose Christ when you’ve hit rock bottom. When you’ve nowhere else to turn, it’s much easier to accept God’s invitation. Dr. Peterson explained this text like this: it’s like a billionaire who has what

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:4-7 NRSV

some might consider the perfect life suddenly choosing God. The billionaire loves their job, they show up every day excited for the work, they find it fulfilling. Everything is right, but they suddenly convert and give it all up for Jesus Christ.

Testimonies are weird. They call on us to be different, to think differently about our lives, and here in Paul's letters to the church in Philippi we see that what we thought might be the best, is in fact rubbish. Now oftentimes in my sermons I end with questions for you to ponder. But today it's different. Today I need you to understand that each and every single one of you are called by God. Maybe not to the same ministry as me, but that doesn't mean your call is any less important. You have been chosen, picked, loved, and cherished. So when things get hard or times get tough, never forget that. Amen.