

**PROPER:**           **PROPER 23, YEAR A**  
**TEXT:**             **MATTHEW 22:1-14**  
**PREACHED AT ST. PAUL’S, MAGNOLIA SPRINGS, ON SUNDAY,**  
**OCTOBER 15, 2017.**

**ONE SENTENCE:**     *As Christians, we need to reflect on the values we intend  
the embrace, and repent of others.*

It is good to be back with you today, after last Sunday’s Hurricane Nate hiatus.

Fortunately, the gospel lessons for last week and this week have similar themes. *And that does not mean that you are going to get a sermon that is twice as long today!* It merely means I can double-down on the point of the lessons – at least as I see them.

Last week’s gospel lesson was the Parable of the Tenants. It is the well-known story of the wicked land tenants who refused to give the landowner his due portion of the harvest. In refusing to do so, they reject, beat, and kill the landowner’s representatives.

The upshot is that Jesus is telling the Pharisees – read, religious authorities – this parable. He tells them that they have not been faithful stewards of God’s vineyard and that God will throw them out and give the kingdom to someone else.

As you might guess, that parable was not well-received by the Pharisees.

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Today's gospel, as I read it, carries a similar theme. It is the Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

In Jesus' story, a king issues an invitation for people to come to his son's wedding banquet. As is the case with many invitations today, there were few RSVPs. If the people *did* respond, they gave lame excuses. The king was not pleased. So, he invited others – we are to assume not the “A” list – the great unwashed; those considered unworthy.

This, too, is a story of those who have been chosen, failing to follow the call of one who gives, one who invites.

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It is not hard to decipher the meaning of these parables. *Those who have been blessed... those who have received... those who were privileged... have rejected the call and responsibility.*

The Kingdom of God will be bequeathed to someone more receptive.

Jesus does not sugar-coat it: *“Therefore 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.”*

It is no surprise then, that in Matthew's account, in a few short days Jesus would be crucified. His words had offended the religious authorities. From Jesus' point of view, they had not *produced the fruits of the kingdom*.

These two parables – from last Sunday and today – raise two questions in my mind. And then they lead to a third matter.

The first question is, *what are fruits of the Kingdom?*

The second question is, *have we produced fruits of the Kingdom?*

Just ponder those questions for a moment. Don't run to quick and facile answers. Stay with the questions for a few moments... *while I challenge you a little more*. Maybe more than a little.

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Think for a moment of what we will be doing in a few minutes. After the Creed. After the Prayers of the People. The General Confession.

*Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father;  
in your compassion forgive us our sins,  
known and unknown,  
things done and left undone...*

This is not the personal confession. This is not your personal accountability. This is a corporate confession – the confession of the Body. This is not the opportunity to confess those personal failures or tendencies in your own life. This is the time when the gathered body of worshippers say together, *Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father...*

Those words... those few moments of the service... are the opportunity we have to reflect on what we have done or not done as inheritors – as stewards -- of the kingdom with which we have been entrusted.

We, now, are the tenants of the vineyard.

We, now, are the people invited to the wedding banquet.

What have we done to bring forth *fruits of the Kingdom?*

The answer may well be *all that we can do*. Our response may be *what more can be reasonably expected?* And, maybe not.

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I think it is important that we not hear the parables from last Sunday and today and think that they were relevant only at the time that Jesus spoke them. They are intended to draw a response on that day... 100 years later... 1,000 years later... 1,500 years later... and today.

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How do Jesus' words speak to the dark corners of our hearts? As we refocus our understanding of the General Confession from something personal to a corporate confession, what are we moved to be and do?

There is a reason the early church did not include the confession within the Eucharist during the season of Easter. It was because they were redeemed, resurrected, new beings, by virtue of the Pascal Mystery. They were called to celebrate that fact.

But now, we are called by scripture and by our Lord to examine our community – our vineyard – and reflect on our *bearing of fruit*.

The teachings of Jesus are not 2,000-year-old words with dust on them. They are living and breathing words, calling us to reflection, prayer, and action today.