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Pentecost 20

Matthew 21:33-43  
GOD'S GARDEN. GOD'S HARVEST.

Perhaps you own rental property and you've had to deal with the frustration of negligent tenants. Or maybe you've been on the other side and you've been late in making rent.

Imagine that you own a few acres of land and you lend it out to some people to raise a garden. Now, you are paying the property tax; you bought the rototiller to work up the soil; you paid to have fertilizer brought in; you purchased all the garden tools, the wheel barrels, gloves and all the necessary equipment; you are paying the regular water bill; you even paid for the seeds, oh, and you also built a sizeable shed for all that equipment that even had a nice break room in it for the gardeners to come in out of the rain. Any time they said it wasn't enough to get the job done, you purchased more of whatever they needed. Would it be too much for you to expect some of the produce at the end of summer?

Wouldn't it gall you if the gardeners insisted on keeping it all for themselves? Wouldn't it be downright criminal if they sued you claiming that the property really belonged to them since they were there most of the time and that land was their livelihood? Imagine if they got ugly and threatened your family unless you left them alone.

God is the owner of the garden. We are the gardeners. God has provided us with everything. You learned it in catechism class. *I believe that God made me and every creature and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle and all I own, and all that I need to keep my body and life, and be defending me against all danger and guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it.* That's from Luther's Small Catechism. You memorized those words so that you would remember that God is the owner of the garden and you are just the gardener. Everything, absolutely everything in your life comes from him. And if that's not enough, He is able to give

you infinitely more. He has the whole world's resources at His disposal and has dedicated Himself to using it all for your well-being. Scarcely do we ever believe it because we can't perceive it. We can't see past our bank account, our office desk, our medications or our broken down vehicles.

But if you have any doubt about His dedication to you, consider how God gave up His Son for you. Would you ever be inclined to find the most dangerous streets in Madison or Milwaukee or even Chicago, and send your own son there to hang out for a while? But in Jesus' parable the landowner sent his son to the tenants even after the tenants had treated numerous servants so miserably. Consider how God the Son dedicated his entire life on earth, every waking moment, to win eternal life for you. Consider how He gave Himself into death on the cross so that you wouldn't have to die or descend into hell. Consider how He has anointed you to be lord alongside Himself -lord over life and death, angels and demons, and all things. You will live forever. Through faith in Him you enjoy freedom from worry, freedom from guilt, freedom to serve Him — really serve Him.

He is completely taking care of you in every way. Is it too much for this Almighty Landowner to expect a harvest from us gardeners?

But instead we tend to give God only a section of our lives, don't we? Church or charity we might think belong to God. But the rest of it we figure really isn't any of His business. We naturally think in terms of *my* kids, *my* career, *my* college plans, *my* summer job, *my* basketball skills, *my* feelings, *my* hobbies, *my* salary, *my* Math test, *my* teachers, *my* retirement, *my* free time, *my* investments, *my* privacy, *my* weekends, *my* marriage, *my* single life, *my* health, *my* workout routine, *my* happiness, *my* apartment, *my* schedule, *my* cancer, *my* groceries, *my* grandchildren, *my* laundry, *my* day, *my* life. What's God got to do with any of those things? We may not say it that way, but that's sort of how we tend to approach life. God is usually on the back of our minds as we dive into the day, not the front.

Now, let's ask ourselves, how is that any different from: "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance?" Oh we would never suggest such a thing, would we? It would never enter our minds. But if we ever think in terms of me and mine -the heir, the Son, may as well be dead. We may as well have killed Him

as we each wish to be the lords and gods of our own little universes.

And sometimes in the same way that the tenants in Jesus' parable resented the servants that the owner sent we've even resented those whom God has sent to us, our parents, our pastors, our church leaders when they've reminded us we're not the kings of our own kingdoms.

Jesus' words about the tenants are terrifying: *“Therefore the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit!”* Is that the outcome we want? To have the Kingdom of God taken away from us? I imagine not.

It's not too late. For the very fact that God speaks these things to us today is evidence that He hasn't yet thrown us out of the garden yet. Much to the contrary, there is in His garden a fountain of water in which He invites us to wash ourselves clean every day called Holy Baptism. This Land-owner, Who should have us jailed, to this day keeps sending us His Son, under the mask of bread and wine in the Lord's Super. The Land-owner's Son comes again and again, but He comes not to collect, but to give. He gives us His forgiveness, rescue from death

and the power of the devil, and eternal life. He continues to give us the nutrients of His holy Word, cultivated by His called ministers and nurtured by the fellowship of a congregation of believers. And He sends us His Holy Spirit to keep us in His garden. He hasn't had us evicted from His Kingdom yet. He keeps showing us the most gracious hospitality and He remains completely magnanimous. Will we despise this? Will we treat it as a small matter?

Instead, since He supplies us with everything in every way, let us return all of it back to Him and serve Him with our whole lives. It's not just a good grade I'm aiming for on the Math test. I'm aiming to give God glory by using the abilities He's given me. These aren't my kids that I'm raising for my own fulfillment. They're His. He put His name on them in Baptism. I'm raising them on His behalf. It's not merely a better job, a higher salary, or more clients that I'm shooting for. My goal is to be a credit to Him in all that I do or say as I'm guided by His holy Word. The problems, the cancer, the broken heart is not just mine. They belong to Him and my aim is to honor Him in these things. It's God's garden. Let it be God's harvest.

We heard Jesus say He is the chief cornerstone. We heard it also in the Psalm today. That means Jesus Christ is the main thing to God, and He is the main thing to us. God owes us nothing, but in connection with Jesus He has given us everything. Therefore, Him we love. Him we live for. He expects us to work for Him now. Trusting Christ, we certainly have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Whatever your situation in life, as a believer, God has set you up in His garden. God's garden. God's harvest.