

Personal Bible Study: The Vineyard and the Cornerstone

Theme: God's loving vineyard yields wild grapes, but God sends His Son—the rejected cornerstone—to restore us by grace through faith.

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:7-14; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, You planted us as Your vineyard and sent Your Son to save us. Shine Your face upon us, restore us, and open our hearts to Your Word. In Christ, Amen.

Summary of the Readings

Isaiah 5:1-7 – The “Song of the Vineyard.” God is the beloved vinedresser who carefully plants, protects, and tends His vineyard—Israel and Judah. He expects good grapes, but the vineyard yields wild grapes. God's judgment comes because He looked for justice but saw bloodshed, for righteousness but heard a cry. The Law exposes the gap between God's gracious care and our rebellious fruit.

Psalm 80:7-14 – A communal lament. The psalmist prays, “Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” God brought a vine out of Egypt, planted it, and gave it room. But now the walls are broken down and the vine is ravaged. The plea is for God to return, look down, and visit His vine. This is a prayer for gospel restoration.

Philippians 3:4b-14 – Paul lists his impressive religious credentials: circumcised on the eighth day, of Israel, a Pharisee, blameless under the Law. Yet he counts all of it as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. He wants to be found in Christ, “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ.” He presses on toward resurrection, forgetting what lies behind.

Matthew 21:33-46 – Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants. The landowner plants a vineyard, leases it, and sends servants to collect fruit. The tenants beat, kill, and stone them. Finally the owner sends his son. The tenants kill him, hoping to seize the inheritance. Jesus asks what the owner will do. The leaders answer: he will destroy them and lease the vineyard to others. Jesus quotes Psalm 118: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” The kingdom will be given to a people producing its fruits. The chief priests and Pharisees realize He is speaking about them.

Lutheran Lens: Law and Gospel

In the Lutheran tradition, we read Scripture through the distinction of Law and Gospel. The Law shows us our sin, our wild grapes, our self-righteousness, and our need for a Savior. The Gospel shows us God's grace in Christ: the Son who was rejected and killed, but whom God raised as the cornerstone.

These readings first crush our pride. Isaiah's vineyard, Psalm 80's broken walls, Paul's loss of all things, and Matthew's wicked tenants all reveal that we cannot stand before God on our own merit. But then the Gospel raises us: righteousness is not our own, but Christ's. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works of the Law. And the fruit we bear is not to earn God's love, but because we have been made alive in Christ.

Key Points

1. God is the owner; we are tenants. The vineyard is God's gracious creation, not our possession. He plants, protects, and provides. We are stewards, not masters.
2. Wild grapes reveal the heart. God expects justice and righteousness. Sin is not only private; it is also communal—bloodshed, crying out, neglect of neighbor. The Law names our failure honestly.
3. God's patience is meant to lead to repentance. He sends servant after servant—prophets, messengers, His Word. Finally, He sends His Son. God's judgment is real, but His mission is always to reclaim and restore.
4. Jesus is the rejected cornerstone. The Son is thrown out of the vineyard and killed. But God makes Him the cornerstone. The cross looks like defeat; the resurrection reveals God's strange victory.
5. Righteousness comes by faith, not by pedigree or performance. Paul's testimony is the Lutheran heartbeat: "not having a righteousness of my own... but one that comes through faith in Christ." We are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.
6. The kingdom produces fruit. The vineyard is given to a people who produce its fruits. This is not works-righteousness. Fruit is the evidence of faith, not the cause of salvation. Good works flow from union with Christ.
7. Restoration is God's work. Psalm 80's plea—"Restore us... let your face shine"—is answered in Jesus. God visits His vine in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection. He restores us by His grace.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Where do I see God's careful planting in my life? What "wild grapes" have I produced?
2. What does it mean to pray "Restore us, O God" in my current situation? Where do I need God's face to shine on me?
3. What "gains" do I rely on for my identity or righteousness—achievements, morality, church involvement, reputation? What would it mean to count them loss for Christ?
4. How does knowing Christ differ from trying to be good enough? How does Paul's resurrection hope shape my daily life?
5. Who are the "tenants" today? How can the church become like the wicked tenants? How does this parable call us to repentance?
6. Where have I stumbled over Jesus as the Cornerstone? Where might I be rejecting Him in my life?
7. What does it mean that the kingdom is "given" to a people producing fruits? How does this guard against both laziness and works-righteousness?
8. How does the Lord's Supper connect to this theme? How does God visit His vineyard with forgiveness and strength?
9. How can we speak about this parable without anti-Semitism? What is the true target of Jesus' warning? (Remember: Jesus, Paul, and the first disciples were Jewish. The parable critiques corrupt leadership and all who reject God's Son—including the church.)
10. What is one fruit of the kingdom God is calling me to bear this week?

Application

- Confess and receive forgiveness. Name your wild grapes specifically. Hear the absolution: in Christ, your sins are forgiven.
- Trust in Christ's righteousness, not your own. When you are tempted to measure yourself by performance, repeat Paul's words: "not having a righteousness of my own... but one that comes through faith in Christ."
- Pray Psalm 80:7 daily. "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved." Let it become your Advent-like prayer for renewal.
- Press on in grace. Forget what lies behind—past sins, failures, regrets. Strain forward to what lies ahead: the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
- Steward the vineyard. Use your time, talents, and resources for God's mission. Seek justice, love your neighbor, and care for the vulnerable.

- Gather around Word and Sacrament. God visits His vineyard in worship, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Come regularly to receive His gifts.
- Bear fruit from faith. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, forgiveness—these grow from being rooted in Christ. You do not bear fruit to become saved; you bear fruit because you are saved.
- Guard against anti-Semitism. Reject any misuse of this parable against Jewish people. Pray for Jewish-Christian relations and remember that God's covenant promises remain.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the rejected stone who became our cornerstone. Restore us, forgive our wild grapes, and make us fruitful by Your grace. Let Your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. Amen.

Suggested Hymn: "By Grace I'm Saved" or "The Church's One Foundation".