

Fifth Sunday in Lent; April 6, 2025  
+ Luke 20:9-19 +  
“The Living Word: A Pure Renewal”

**He began to tell them this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time. When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of vineyard. But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. The man went ahead and sent yet another servant, but they also beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. He then sent a third. They also wounded him and threw him out. The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’**

**“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’ They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. So what will the owner of that vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others.”**

**When they heard this, they said, “May it never be!”**

**But he looked at them and said, “Then what about this that is written:**

**The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?**

**“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls.”**

**That very hour the chief priests and experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.**

Through this season of Lent we have been examining the living Word of God – how it works and what it does. The Word provides a strong and steadfast defense. The living Word is also offensive, but it does not only offend. It also brings conversions that change people’s view to look at Jesus. These conversions happen every day for the first time to unbelievers, and every day for ten thousandth time for believers, every time the Word moves our eyes to look at the crucified and risen One. Today we seen that when the Word is received with an open ear and heart, it also brings pure renewal.

When Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants, the living Word is met with refusal. Jesus tells the parable in love to wake up the religious leaders from their spiritual stupor and hypocrisy. The living Word in the flesh speaks the living Word to change them, to convert them. But it only offends them. They and their forefathers are the wicked tenants of this parable. The vineyard is Israel (and Jerusalem, more narrowly – the same Jerusalem Jesus wept over in the previous chapter of Luke’s Gospel). The owner of the vineyard is God, who displays remarkable love and patience for its tenants. He sends them prophet after prophet after prophet because he has always wanted the best for them. For century after century God worked to renew Israel spiritually and, because Israel was a theocracy, politically and economically, too.

But they wouldn’t have it. They wouldn’t listen or believe. And rather than receive the renewal God was sending them, they rejected it violently. Rejection is rejection in the end, whether polite and quiet or loud and violent. But loud and violent rejection will tend to discourage messengers. Yet God did not give up. In a move that will strike any loving parent as unbelievably reckless and unrealistic, God sends his own Son

to those tenants, who had violently rejected the previous messengers. And at the end of the parable, they respond by planning to arrest him and kill them. God had still not given up on trying to renew them. And they were still not done rejecting that renewal with violence. And if you think God was being wildly and unrealistically patient with them in sending his Son to them, look at how wildly unrealistic they are: they actually think God will be pleased with them for doing this and reward them for it.

The thinking of the landlord is absurd, isn't it? Doesn't God get it? Why does he wait so long to take no for an answer, and finally send his Son into that murderous violence? The religious leaders won't change because they don't want to change! And you are perfectly loving! Don't send your only Son into that mess to try to renew what won't be renewed!

If you have Catholic friends, or maybe you've been Catholic yourself, you know St. Jude is the Patron Saint of Lost Causes. Jude was most likely the youngest half-brother of our Savior. We know from the Gospels that Jesus' own brothers at first refused the renewal he came to bring, disbelieving that Jesus was who he said he was. Jesus did not consider him a lost cause, and Jude went on to be a pillar of the early Christian Church.

Think of your own family. Your friends. Do you see any lost causes? Do you ever act like a lost spiritual cause yourself? How many times have to been told to meet Jesus daily in his Word, to be renewed often by his promise of salvation in that living Word? So...do you? Are you? How many times have you been told to abandon that sin you cling to stubbornly, to love your enemies, to put others before yourself? And...do you?

I have never beaten a prophet over the head. And I did not plot Jesus' crucifixion. The Spirit has graciously renewed me by bringing me to faith in Jesus. And he has done the same for you, I assume. But do we share none of the guilt of these tenants? Do we ever resist Jesus' renewal ourselves?

Well, God did not give up the religious leaders of Israel. He kept sending prophets, and then his own Son. Jesus didn't give up on his brother. And he hasn't given up on us, either, when we who do have him in our hearts still show flashes of rejection.

It is good to have a Father who goes to what we would consider absurd lengths of patience. But it is not good, as this parable also teaches, to test his limit. Because a limit he does have. Yet, his desire to renew us and the whole world moves him to send into this world full of sinners his own, only, beloved Son.

The renewal Jesus brings is one all sinners need, and one that all sinners naturally reject. We and all sinners are born with the desire for no God to serve and follow, but the desire to be our own masters and to lead ourselves in whatever direction pleases us. The workers in that vineyard live on that model: there is an owner, but we will live like there is not. We will do as we please and call this vineyard our own. And that is the model for life we naturally followed, too.

He renewed you and me by the living Word spoken over us in baptism, by burying our sin with Christ and raising us up in faith. Whenever we walk back to those waters in faith he renews us. When our faith teeters and wavers, he keeps renewing by the Word spoken and the living Word under bread and wine. His renewal is once and then every time the Word touches our hearts.

Remember that you have been renewed, and still are. Remember that please when you see someone you think is a lost cause. Remember how patient God was with those wicked religious leaders, remember St.

Jude, and remember yourself who once was spiritually dead yourself. And be as patient as God, but also as urgent as Jesus is when he speaks this parable. It is not too late for a person until God's patience finally runs out. Don't lose yours first. Remember the Word does have that divine power to renew the soul in Christ. Be patient with yourself, too, when your faith is wavering. Be patient but also remember the living Word is what will renew you again and again.

We cannot explain why many refuse this renewal, other than to say it is the sinner's natural state to refuse it and remain the master of his own destiny, even if that destiny ends in destruction. And we can say refusals are not due to the Father's lack of trying, lack of patience, of lack of power in the living Word he uses. And while the tragedy of Jesus' words are real, we can also find their beauty: **"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls."** Those who reject God's renewal in Christ, those who spurn the stone of salvation fall and break in the hour of death and are crushed when Christ returns. But no amount of rejection changes the objective reality that Christ is the cornerstone.

He is the first stone laid in the structure, the stone that is perfect and makes all the other stones perfect. The cornerstone of a building needed to be more than decorative in Jesus' day. It had a more important role than having a year or a dedication slogan engraved on it. It had to be perfectly straight so that all the stones laid out from it and stacked up from it formed a perfect structure. Only on a perfect cornerstone could a building stand.

Jesus is perfect. Conceived and born perfect, his will perfectly aligned with the Father's. In him there was no need for renewal, because there was no sin. The Word in the Flesh took the living Word to heart perfectly and followed it perfectly. He shed holy blood to save us. He is the perfect cornerstone that has been laid down for the Holy Church, all believers. Through faith in him, every believer, his whole Church, is laid out and stacked up in one structure. We were imperfect stones; built on him, we are made into a perfect structure, the Holy Christian Church.

This is true renewal: to be a lone, imperfect stone, good for nothing, lying on your own; and then to be taken hold off, washed clean and made perfect on Christ, built on him into the Church of God.

That very hour the religious leaders who rejected Christ's renewal started plotting his death. Through that rejection, the perfect cornerstone was laid for us to be built on. We were built into that Church once when the Spirit brought us to faith; we were made new that one time. But it is also an ongoing renewal. We are living stones with our spiritual life renewed every day by the living Word.

Thank God you've been renewed in Christ. Keep being renewed by the living Word. And share the Father's patience and diligence for yourself and for all others. Amen.