

**LENT 5**  
**“LOVE AT ALL COSTS”**  
**Lk. 20:9-20 Isa. 43:16-21**

Is the parable before us mainly one of Law, warning us not to reject God? Or mainly Gospel, teaching us about the amazing, unrelenting mercy and love of our heavenly Father?

It's both, is it not? But like last week's parable of the Prodigal Son, it's the Gospel that shines through most clearly! ...namely the *constant mercy and almost obsessive love* of God who doesn't easily give up on *us*. It shows His burning desire to love and save us, **AT ALL COSTS**.

How totally different—no, radical, is God's than others in this world! Not the fleeting, conditional friendliness that often passes for love in our world, but a vast, enduring, *sacrificial* love that would act the way the vineyard owner did in this parable.

***“A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.”*** The people listening to Jesus would have understood this situation. Many were tenant farmers, working on land owned by someone who lived far away. And notice it's the owner who prepared the soil, planted the vines, built the protective wall, dug the winepress – everything needed to almost guarantee a fruitful harvest. The tenants' job was simple: tend the vines, gather the grapes when ripe, and give the owner his agreed-upon share.

Except, when harvest time arrived, the tenants had other ideas. One by one, the owner sent his servants to collect his due share. And each were shamefully treated – beaten, insulted, and sent away empty-handed. How do you think a typical landowner would react! How would YOU react if it were your land? Outrage! Eviction! Legal action, speedy and harsh!

But *this* owner is different. He acts with amazing patience. He goes the extra mile... and then another... **LOVE AT ALL COSTS!** He keeps sending servants, hoping that these tenants will see the error of their ways, repent, and give what is due.

He even reasons out loud: ***“What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.”***

Does that even make sense? What kind of loving father sends his dearly loved, his *only* son, into the hands of vicious rebels who've already proven their hostility? It seems careless—idiotic even!

But when the tenants see the son, their sinful thinking takes over. Possibly assuming the long-absent owner must be dead, they decide: ***“This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.”*** This sounds crazy, but back then, if an owner died without heirs, the tenants might well have been able to claim it. So, they drag the son outside the vineyard and kill him. Jesus then poses the critical question: ***“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”***

The answer is obvious: He *will* come and execute justice. The sending of the son was the owner's final appeal. He represented the owner's very heart—**LOVE AT ALL COSTS**. Everything depended on how they responded to the son. To reject the son is to reject the owner completely, leaving only judgment.

In the end, the tenants weren't condemned because they were bad farmers or because their harvest failed. They were condemned because they rejected the son. Reject the Son—reject the Father's love through Him – and you're lost.

The scribes and chief priests listening that day understood exactly whom Jesus was talking about. And proved the parable true by seeking to lay hands on *Him*, the true Son... But the parable isn't just about *them*. It forces us to ask: What about *me*?

That's a critical question, maybe uncomfortable, but necessary in this Lenten season. If we hear this parable only as a story about the failures of those Jewish leaders – then we haven't truly heard it at all. So, where do we fit into this story?

Well, there's only one place for us in this parable, and it's not comfortable: **WE'RE THE TENANTS!** We're the ones who by nature want to be the owners. It's baked into our sinful nature—it's in our DNA—it's that tendency inherited from Adam and Eve—who weren't satisfied with all the trees of the Garden but one—it's that tendency to grasp for control, to want it all, to declare independence from the true Owner.

Consider the subtle ways of our world, and even of our own hearts: **"It's *my* money, I earned it, I'll spend it as I want."** **"It's *my* body; I'll do what I want with it."** **"It's *my* time; I'll decide how to use it."** **"It's *my* life, don't tell me how to live it; I don't need anyone—God included, dictating my choices."** But... concede that God is the true Owner of all things, recognizing that everything we have is a gift—on loan from Him—and admitting that He desires (*and deserves*) a return on His investment in our lives—a return of faith, love, and obedience? No way! Our sinful hearts resist that.

How incredibly generous God has been to us! How much He has given us – life, breath, abilities, resources, relationships, His Word, His Sacraments, and His Church! And how little He asks in return – our trust, our love, our obedience flowing from faith. And yet... how often do we withhold?

Who are the servants God sends *to you* today, asking for a share of the fruit He desires from His vineyard—the fruit of faith active in love? Who in your life needs *your* time? Who needs *your* help? *your* resources? *your* care, your compassion, a listening ear, a word of encouragement, a sympathetic heart?

Have we sometimes sent *them* away empty-handed? Have we turned a cold shoulder or deaf ear because we were too preoccupied with our *own* plans, our *own* inheritance? Have we even beaten them with razor-sharp words, impatience, anger, or simply our indifference?

It's easy to stand back and condemn those wicked tenants in the story, isn't it? Until the mirror turns towards us... "But surely, we would never do that to the *Son*! We're Christians! We believe in Jesus! We love the Son!" And yet... didn't our Lord Jesus Himself say: **"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me?"** When we disregard the needy servant sent our way, in a way, don't we disregard the Son who identifies with them? A sobering thought, isn't it?

**"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others."** This is the judgment spoken in the parable. And looking at our own hearts, isn't this what we deserve also? If Jesus had ended His teaching right there, what hope would we have?

But Jesus didn't come *only* to show us our sin and it's just consequence. He came to save us from it! But, to save us, He must first *break* us... Break our **pride**... our **illusions of ownership**... our **self-centeredness**... our cold, hard, **rebellious hearts**.

Why? Because as Jesus explains: ***"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."*** This rejected stone is Jesus Himself! And He gives two possible outcomes: ***"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."***

Now, neither ***"broken to pieces"*** nor ***"crushed"*** sounds particularly pleasant! But there's a big difference. It is one thing to ***fall on*** the Stone, Jesus Christ, in **repentance and faith**. This falling breaks us. It shatters our self-reliance and pride. But this breaking is a *merciful* breaking. He breaks us in order to *heal* us. He wounds us with the Law so that He might bind us up with His Gospel. He breaks us *now*, in this life, through repentance, so that we won't be ***crushed*** and condemned by that same Stone falling upon us in judgment on the Last Day. He breaks us free from our sin so that we might find in Him alone the peace, forgiveness, and the belonging we've yearned for all along.

King David knew this when he prayed: ***"A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."*** When we're brought low by the recognition of our sin and the Law's righteous demands which we can't fulfill and turn to God in repentance and faith—He doesn't turn us away! He welcomes us. He makes us whole again through the forgiveness won by His Son. And He says: ***I forgive you...***

How can He forgive disobedient tenants like us? It's the ***"new thing"*** God promised through Isaiah, in our Old Testament reading... that God, in His infinite wisdom and love, would use the very wickedness of the tenants—*our* wickedness, *our* sin that nailed His Son to the cross—as the means to bring life to the world! He allowed His beloved Son to be killed ***so that all who believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life.***

This was His plan from eternity—to use sin to destroy sin's power. To send His Son into death to shatter the grip of death itself. To execute His righteous judgment against *our* sin on Jesus, His innocent Son, so that judgment might not fall on *us*. Our forgiving, merciful, and saving God desires ***not one sinner*** to be lost but ***desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*** He desires our lives to be rebuilt, founded securely on the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, and His gift of forgiveness and everlasting life. **LOVE AT ALL COSTS!**

And you can be fully sure of this forgiveness, because you're about to hear those words spoken directly to *you*. The words of Christ Himself: ***"Take, eat; this is my body, given for you."*** ***"Take, drink; this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."***

***For you!*** Because Jesus, the beloved Son, came ***for you***. He entered the vineyard of this world ***for you***. He allowed Himself to be cast out and killed ***for you***. He took *your* judgment—the judgment deserved by sinful tenants, upon Himself. And He gives you *His* life. He comes to you in this meal so that you might live and not die. ***God is doing a new thing*** right here, right now, *in you*. When you receive the true body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and wine, that new life is at work in you—forgiving, assuring, strengthening, and changing you. He lives in you, and you live in Him, empowering you to produce the good fruits of faith He desires.

And so, because of Christ, you need not fear the judgment of God—not now, and not on the Last Day. Because on the cross, Jesus promised, ***“It is finished!”*** Your debt is paid. Your peace is made. ***It is finished*** in Christ.

So, this Lent, as you look to the cross, don’t feel guilty. Instead, see *love*. See the measure of God’s fervent love for *you*. That’s the message of the cross. It is the message of Lent. It’s the message we just sang when we sang ***“My Song Is Love Unknown.”*** You’re loved with a love far greater than you can ever fully realize. It is a love powerful enough to ***make all things*** – even rebellious, broken tenants like us – truly ***new***.

So come to your Savior... and fall on Him, the Cornerstone, with all the sin, all the failure, all the brokenness of your life. And He who was broken ***for you*** will raise you up, forgive you, heal you, and give you His everlasting life. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.