

The Last Word

18th Sun. after Pent. – 10/04/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Matthew 21:33-46 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 43 [Jesus says to the religious leaders,] **“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ Why is it so important to us, especially in the midst of a disagreement, to have the last word?
 - Don't try and deny it – we've all done this more than once. And we see it all around us – on TV debates, in interviews, at work between supervisors and workers, at school on the playground and at home with family.
 - Especially whenever we're in an argument ... I mean a “discussion”, we think that having the last word validates our opinions and raises our self-worth. And sadly, striving to have that last word often means that we are inconsiderate of the feelings and opinions – yes, even the good words – of others.
 - Still, instinctively, we seek to have the last word because we think it elevates our status over others and if we can somehow convince ourselves that we are right... then well...we don't need to change.
- ⊗ Of course there are times when we may regret our fixation on having the last word – such as the rare times that we care enough about the other person to see how much it really did hurt him/her.
 - But most regrettable of all are the times that we and others insist that we have the last word in our relationship and conversations with God. Not only does it run the risk of cutting off all conversation with Him for eternity, it can also mean missing the joy of a loving and saving relationship with our Savior from sin – who is Jesus, the living Word and the Last Word from God Himself.

I. God has given His Word – All we Need.

- ⊗ Today's Gospel Reading is set on the Monday of Passion Week. Jesus entered Jerusalem the day before to the crowd's shouts of “Hosanna...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mat. 21:9), followed by Jesus, that same day, driving the money changers out of the temple and convicting the religious leaders in charge of turning the Lord's house into a “den of robbers” (Mat. 21:13).
 - Now on Monday, Jesus has returned to the temple to have those leaders, who consider themselves to be the ones in authority over God's people, challenge Him, “By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?”, they ask (Mat. 21:23). They want to be “Master” of God's vineyard instead of God.
 - And so Jesus directs their thoughts to the words of the prophet Isaiah in today's Old Testament Reading where God had a similar confrontation with the Israelites regarding who is truly the master in this relationship.
 - The vineyard in both Isaiah's and Jesus' parables are the believers of God in His Church. God's the one, not the people themselves or the tenants/leaders He has put in place to care for the vineyard, who is in charge of things.

- ⊗ And it's out of tremendous love and care for the souls in the vineyard, that God has done everything needed to assure that the vineyard will be fruitful. He planted the vineyard. He put a fence around it for protection. He dug a winepress for processing the harvest and He built a tower to detect and repel all evil threats.
 - ➔ And yes, He even put tenants in place, in the form of the Levites to serve as priests (the first clergy). They were to tend and care for His precious plants and property. He even told them that a portion of the produce of His vineyard; His church, would be given to them as compensation for their labors. But that didn't mean they were to have the last word. No, the vineyard and the fruit produced; the glory and honor; the purpose and worship within the vineyard itself still always belongs to the Master; to the Lord our God.
- ⊗ What a wonderful picture of what God has done for His people. This was God's Word; the promise that He would shower blessings upon them – upon us for all eternity!
 - ➔ He gave His Word to His people over and over, and with Isaiah He would have been delighted for that to be the last word; that His people, Israel would then trust and follow in faith.
 - ➔ God has given this same sort of blessings even to us all these years later. He still promises His presence with us. He still gives us His word of truth and His promise of forgiveness and salvation in His Son. Why? Because His will and desire is still that we be His beloved people into eternity.
- ⊗ Even when God's people rebelled and refused to bear fruit in the past, He sent His word to them again and again through one prophet after another. God asks in Isaiah 5:4, "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?"
 - ➔ That's what Jesus is talking about when He says in His parable, "When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them" (vv.34-36).
 - ➔ If only any one of these words from God could have been the last word, God's reply would be, "All is forgiven! You are still mine!" "Finally", verse 37 says, God "sent His Son". Surely this would be the last word, for everyone knows that the Son speaks and holds the same authority as the Father; as the Master.

II. We must have the last word.

- ⊗ But no, sin still reigned in the hearts of mankind; always wanting to have the last word for ourselves.
 - ➔ When Jesus came from God it was the Jewish leaders who were determined to have the last word. God had already sent prophet after prophet, and as the tenants in the parable killed the master's servants one after another, so Jesus says later that week as His own crucifixion drew near, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Mat. 23:37).
 - ➔ Time and again, the tenants; the religious leaders, and even the people themselves, insisted that the last word must be their own.
- ⊗ Finally, even the Master's last gracious invitation, sent to them with the coming of His only begotten Son, was soundly rejected in a show of blatant blasphemy and arrogance. These so-called religious men believed they were the final authority from God.

- And so they hurled false accusations and killed the Son by beating and crucifying Him in public; taking God's authority over His Church as their own; believing that they finally would have the last word.
- ✘ Even now today in God's Church the temptation to have the last word still runs deep. No folks, we can't just read this parable, shake our heads and conclude, "Those foolish, foolish Jews". For today pastor and people alike still seek our own authority over God's. We may not say it out loud, but our actions reveal the silent conversations with God that sound something like this:
 - "Yes, Lord, I know what you say in Your 6th Commandment about marriage and living together and intimate relationships, but hey God, we're really in love."
 - "I know Lord that You have called us to tend for Your Church by giving our tithe regularly and by serving You with our time and talents so that Your ministry can reach out and grow. And yes, I know You promise even then to still provide for everything that I need, but surely you didn't mean for us to do it in times like this, so I'm holding back for myself just in case."
 - "Yes, Lord, I know You love everyone, and You have called us all even to love and pray for our enemies, but come on, You can't really expect me to forgive her!; to love him and pray for his well-being!"

III. Jesus will have the last word.

- ✘ Even at the end of His parable, do you see what Jesus does? He still gives His enemies one more chance. He asks them in verse 40, "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"
 - And in the next verse they convict themselves with the last word – not of self-authority, but of the just punishment and consequence that comes with unrelenting unbelief. "They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons'" (v.41).
- ✘ With that Jesus does get the final word, pointing them to the Master's own Word in Psalm 118, "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"'"?
 - Those religious leaders; they are supposed to be the "builders"; the ones who knew God's Word regarding the promised Messiah, and yet their own obsession with power led them to reject Him when He came, born of a virgin in Bethlehem, as a Galilean, speaking with the authority of God.
 - And still today the Jewish religion refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Son of God and Savior, as do many, many more people around us each day. But that rejected "stone" is in fact the "cornerstone" of God's established Church. He is the only One whose death and resurrection establishes the right and true way to salvation and forgiveness for all people and all generations!
- ✘ Psalm 118 says it is all "the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Well friends, not only is that word regarding Jesus the final and authoritative word, but I have to ask, "Is it actually 'marvelous in [your] eyes?'"
 - Do you believe with your entire being that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life; that no one comes to the Father" except by faith in Him? (Jn. 14:6). ... Are you not only willing to, but even comfortable letting Jesus' and the Father's Word in the Bible be the "last word"? ... Even when it doesn't line up with what's popular, or politically or culturally expedient; even when it means you

might need to adjust your own desires and wants and priorities? ... Is it marvelous even then?...

→ To sincerely answer “yes”, even if you struggle in those things, is to be in the Master’s vineyard by grace. To answer “no” is to live as the unbelieving religious leaders standing before Jesus; whom Jesus said would have “the kingdom of God”; that is the free gift of salvation in Jesus alone, taken away from them (v.43). These are the ones, who by their own refusal to let go and turn to Jesus in repentance, end up “broken” and “crushed” by the Rock of Salvation, Jesus.

Conclusion

- ⊗ But for us, because of the Master’s love and grace, we are the ones blessed to receive a place in His vineyard here on earth and forever in eternity. We are the ones to whom Christ continues to come and speak with His saving and authoritative Word of truth. We actually crave for THE Last Word, Jesus to speak to us through the faithful preaching of His New Testament tenants – the pastors in His true Church.
 - We thirst and relish His Word with water in Holy Baptism as it binds us to what the Last Word, Jesus did for us on the cross.
 - And we hunger for the Last Word’s body and blood offered from His table in which He feeds us His very gift of forgiveness, and strengthens us to bear His fruit as we live here in His vineyard.
- ⊗ That fruit that we bear, Paul identifies as one fruit in Galatians 5:22-23, showing itself in our lives as “the fruit of the Spirit” which “is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, (and) self-control”.
 - You see, it’s not for us to have the last word! Jesus is the Last Word, regarding sin and forgiveness and eternal salvation! All we can say is “Alleluia! Praise the Lord!” Amen.