

Let Us Go and Work in the Vineyard

Grace to you and peace from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus said: What do you think? and then told the chief priests and elders in the temple a parable about 2 sons who are asked by their father to go and work in “the” vineyard.

I am guessing that most of you have already assumed the obvious; that this parable is about religious hypocrisy and repentance. And you would not be wrong.

You all know me. I see something else in this parable. God’s vineyard.

I know there are many of you here who enjoy gardening.

Our own Fr. Rob and his husband are Certified Master Gardeners.

As I child, I lived in 7 different houses and all had yards. Of course that meant yardwork for my siblings and me. I hated it! When we were a little older Mom would give each of us a section of the yard to tend to. I would go out but often found reasons—excuses really, not to do the work.

I just have never had the least bit of interest in horticulture, agriculture, farming, you name it. If it has anything to do with dirt and bugs and sun and sweat and exertion, forget it! I’m out!

Whether you are like me or not I am sure we can all agree that it is a wonderful thing to be able to take a stroll through a beautiful garden. Have you ever had the experience of gardens the likes of the famous Butchart Gardens in Victoria, BC? Gorgeous!

Some of us love vegetables, fruit, and some of us both. I’m a vegetable person. I make it a habit to eat a salad of mixed lettuces and vegetables almost every day. Isn’t it so lovely to pass by the fields of dark soil and growing vegetables in the Salinas Valley.

Or what about the many orchards one passes by on trips through the Central Valley and Northern California, the citrus, the nut trees, the apples. And then, of course, our own grape vineyards right here in San Luis County. God’s vineyard.

Thinking about it, doesn’t it give us such a peaceful, pleasing feeling? But you won’t catch me working in any of those fields, orchards, or vineyards! I am so grateful for the people who do that work.

I’m also not much on pets or animals in general. I like them. Just as long as they are someone else’s. It’s not that I don’t care exactly. It’s not that I have never had to care for a pet—just that the pet was always someone else’s.

Yes, even animals are part of God’s vineyard.

I just have had a hard time feeling called to the hands-on work in God’s Vineyard of creation. So, what’s the problem with that?

The problem is that I had a very narrow vision of what working in God’s Vineyard meant.

Here's why:

First, I know I don't need to tell you that the world, our world, the one which we rely on to sustain **human** life, is so much more than the yard around our homes, this city of Arroyo Grande, or our wider Five Cities community.

Our world is threatened more than we tend to allow ourselves to think about or even know.

I was completely inattentive for at least 30 years to the term "Global Warming". In fact I don't think I had even heard the term until Al Gore got some bad press for his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006. And even after that, it took a few more years for it to sink in that not only was it true, but that it was real.

Since then, with all the calls for change from the science experts and whistleblowers like Al Gore and Greta Thunberg, the international community, world governments, corporations, local businesses, and likely many individuals have paid little attention—sadly including me.

Corporate greed is alive and well and still pretending to care about the environment. And the current administration believes there is no threat so has rolled back laws and regulation protections that had previously been enacted so they can allow for the expansion of those very human causes of global warming, food insecurity, food and water contamination, poor air quality, and pollution of the oceans.

Speaking of corporate greed, here's an example:

I recently learned about something you may already know about. Carbon credits.

Quoting from the offset guide:

A carbon credit is a tradable certificate or permit that represents the removal, reduction, or avoidance of one metric ton of any form of greenhouse gas.

In short, it means that the companies who put in place processes for reducing the production of greenhouse gases can get a credit that allows them to emit some of the greenhouse gas that they still produce.

Now I won't pretend I fully understand this, but it basically is supposed to reward companies for reducing the production of greenhouse gases. But like just about every program set up for good, ways to corrupt it have become rampant. In other words, "we can say we did, but we really didn't", "it looks good on paper". (If you want more information on this you can research it at offsetguide.org.)

A few years ago I preached a sermon about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in which I substituted the earth for Lazarus. I gave this sermon because I had finally come to understand the delicate balance of nature and the gravity of human actions that are causing the acceleration of climate change.

A dear priest friend of mine who has degrees in science and nursing told me recently that the earth has been destroyed 5 times already in its 4.5 billion years of existence. All of those were caused by natural disasters and life was nearly completely wiped out. Now is the first time earth is being destroyed by other than natural disasters.

Does that mean that God's Vineyard (creation) will disappear? No. The vineyard belongs to God and God is in charge.

Some have called the findings of the scientific community fake news.
Maybe.

What, then? Whether it is true or fake, our responsibility to “go work in the vineyard” still exists.

So we can ask, “what does it mean for us to go to work in the vineyard?”

It means moving from environmental lip service to faithful stewardship. Moving from just saying I will, to actually doing it.

It means more than pulling weeds from a flower garden.

God calls us to move from environmental convenience to conversion of heart and action.

I once saw no point in “recycling”. I thought it was just a gimmick.

Now? Here’s an example: I recently got an A+ with smiley face on my recycle bin from the garbage police.

I admit that seems like a small thing. But it was so much easier to just plop everything into one garbage can instead of having to pay attention to what goes where.

Even at our most recent SLO clergy gathering we all tried to pay attention into which bin to put food scraps, recycling, and trash.

The Episcopal Church recognizes a Season of Creation Care during late summer/early fall. At St. Barnabas it is 7 Sundays and our worship service begins with words we recite in the **Profession of Creation**—what we believe about creation. We say: “we believe in the hope that one day God will put and to all... destructive forces.” I think that includes human actions.

Then we have our **Prayers of the People** dedicated to our hope that we will live lives in harmony with all of God’s creation. One of the stanza’s in the prayer states:

We pray you to touch the hearts of those of us who have forsaken your creation for our own gain and false prosperity and for the complicity of all,

That we may hear and respond to the groaning of the Earth’s adversity.

While we believe that God is in charge and will make sure that God’s vineyard is cared for, that is our call to the Vineyard here at St. Barnabas. To work in the Vineyard we must by word and action advocate for the wellbeing of earth—all that is in it in all ways and in all places.

For the 11 years that I have been here I know our vestry have been making decisions for our parish that help to preserve and restore the land. But what else can we do?

Well, I am not going to name those ideas here.

I encourage us to have conversations with one another and as we brainstorm in community I know God’s Holy Spirit will lead us to more and more ways that show our obedience go work in God’s Vineyard.

As followers of Jesus, “the climate refugee...the seed of life who came to reconcile and renew this world” let us say yes to God’s call to “go to work in his Vineyard” and care for this beautiful home God has given us.

I look forward to seeing and hearing the fruit of joy that will come from being together in that work.