

Prepared Sermon for
Sunday 4 October 2026 (Pentecost 19)
by Fr. Paul Kumasaka

The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls. (Matthew 21:44)

Spending his last days on earth, Jesus continues to challenge his opponents, namely the religious leaders of the Temple. This is a second one of the parables related to the workers of the vineyard. Jesus uses the pictures of good and bad vineyard workers to point out the wrong attitude of those who oppose him. For him, the vineyard is the kingdom of God in which the people receive the Word to be cultivated, grown, and harvested. Without having good caretakers who help God's work, the kingdom will not grow.

In the previous verses of Matthew 21, Jesus drew another picture of vineyard workers, the two sons and their owners (Matthew 21:28-32). This time he presents the radical one. Before we start exploring the message from this parable, let us understand the circumstance of which makes Jesus to be aggressive towards his opponents. This is a few days after when he triumphantly made his entrance to Jerusalem (Palm Sunday). Then he got angry when he saw the people uses the House of Prayer (Temple) as the market place, to earn income for their benefit (nothing they offer to God!) So Jesus turned their trading tables, spilt the coins for money exchange, and throw away doves for the ritual sacrifice. This had made the leaders of the Temple furious. Up to this point, their anger and resentment against Jesus was getting bigger like an inflating balloon. So they continue to plot against him, to 'remove' him from their 'territory.'

Knowing all of their intentions, Jesus made this challenge, by speaking out the second parable of vineyard workers. Three key personalities in this parable are: The landowner, The tenants, and the slaves with the son of landowner. In the time of the New Testament, the social structure in Israel was very solid, and hierarchical. Whole

society was governed and controlled by the occupying Roman empire. Then such religious leaders as the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the Chief Priests used their power to secure their authority. Often they threatened the people by over-emphasising the matter of sin and punishment, but they did not present God's love.

To defend their power and authority, those leaders did not wish to be replaced by others. They wanted to sit on the seat of comfort from which they look down the lower class citizens.

Under the top level of social structure, the wealthy landowners who were able to own the land, the buildings, workers and slaves. Then, further down the structure, artisans, craftsmen, followed. Because of their skills, they gained a certain level of respect in the society. Working class people was placed further down, namely, fishermen, farm workers, employed builders, etc. The rest that were sitting on the bottom of the structure were the social outcasts. Slaves, Tax Collectors, etc. Though there was a law imposed by the Roman empire that the slaves can be free if certain amount of money was paid, the slaves did not have any freedom of choice of their day to day life.

Ones who were sitting on the higher level did not wish to lose their power, authority and freedom. Especially for the religious leaders, they did not want to lose their authority. If they notice anyone comes to take over their positions, they did everything to reject and remove that person or group, to secure their status.

Imagine you are witnessing a sharp tension between two people who appears to be powerful and popular among the others. Let me draw a picture of a primary school classroom. Jack was always the number one in the class. He is clever and study well. He runs, swims, playing ball games so excellently. His parents are wealthy and he never had problem of missing out to buy things he wants. So Jack has been a center of attention in the class, until Brian joined the class. Brian was transferred from another

school, and on his first day, he became so popular. He was friendly to everyone, he answered the questions asked by the teachers perfectly, and during the lunch break, he played basketball with his new classmate and amazed them because of his great skills. As the days were passing, Jack had become so jealous. He began worrying losing his power and popularity in the class, because the new kid is over taking. In the end, he did some dirty tricks to Brian; spreading fake rumors and gossips, and eventually he tackled Brian and had a painful fight.

Getting back to explore this parable, how much can we see the same or similar picture in today's society? The landowner who entrusted his vineyard to the group of farm hands (tenants) went away, by hoping that his employed workers do everything properly to produce grapes with high quality. Getting closer to the harvest time, the owner of the vineyard decided to increase the number of workers in order to make the harvest easier and quicker. So, he started sending slaves as the extra helpers to the tenants.

But the tenants took it wrongly. Instead of rejoicing to see extra helpers, they were threatened to lose their job, as they thought the slaves were going to take over their job. The slaves in the parable who were rejected and knocked down, and even been killed symbolises the prophets of the Old Testament who were rejected by then the religious authorities. You can think how they rejected the prophets like Jeremiah and Hosea. Then the landowner decided to send his own son, anticipating that the tenants will respect him. But they did the opposite. 'The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' (V. 38) Of course the son sent by the landowner is Jesus himself. Indeed, the religious leaders who did not want to be taken over by Jesus were intending to remove and delete him, and the plan was already under the way.

While they planned to kill him, for the defense of their position, power, authority, and comfort, Jesus did not attempt to defend him from those violent hands. To let the others, including you and I, live and reconcile with God, he chose to be broken in pieces. May his Holy Cross be the reminder of our identity and direction of faith journey.