

Toddlers & Lions Matthew 21:33-46

Pastor Bill Mosley

Jeff Whillock has a 16 month old. He has noticed that the toddler is just learning to say "mine." I hate to tell you, Jeff, your toddler is approaching the "terrible twos." observing the baby, Jeff has written the Toddler Property Laws. There are 7:

Toddler Property Laws

- 1 If I like it it's mine.
- 2 If it's in my hand, it's mine.
- 3 If I can take it from you, it's mine.
- 4 If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
- 5 If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in *any* way.
- 6 If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
- 7 If it looks just like mine, it *is* mine.

It starts early. The tendency when you have something for a long time to believe that it belongs to you. Being people of short memories, we forget the way things really are. That which we are just using now becomes ours.

In a similar vein, people refer to "my house" all the while the bank holds the mortgage on the property.

Jesus weaves together two threads -- the evil house-holder/absentee landlord and the righteous struggling oppressed tenants along with all that vineyard imagery from Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80 and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and other prophets. What story is he going to tell?

The landowner provides a first class lease, with vines that bear fruit, a fence, a tower for a lookout, and even production facilities to produce the wine. And he leased it out, expecting a return on his investment. He sent collectors for the rent. They are refused, turned away, even killed. He sends his son. The tenants even kill the landlord's son.

This is a very real story. Share-croppers were expected to pay their own expenses (seed, farming equipment, field hands' wages, etc.), and in return for the use of the land, they had to pay their landlord from one quarter to one half of the crop. Much of Galilee at that time was in the hands of foreign landlords.

And these landlords could call on the Roman Army to enforce their interests. So what will they do? Bring in the army and have the tenants killed, and put in tenants that will pay the rent.

But while this story is real, it is a story told by Jesus. Whose story does he tell?

He tells his own story -- but to people who are listening for the story **they** want to hear. People are cheering inside when the tenants kill the rent-collectors - and even when they plot to kill the son.

Of course, the religious leaders hear a religious story - what's wrong with the vineyard? Is it God's neglect (Ps 80) or is it our problem (Isaiah et al)?

God sees His Church as doing cosmic things locally. That is, God marshals everything that is required in each and every place to perform the mission that is needed in that place.

For those who see themselves as owners and not as tenants, the time is coming when God the householder says, to their surprise, You have done me wrong. My Church is

going to accomplish that which I have purposed it in the world and since you are not going to do it, I will get others who will.

Each and every day we see God's visible presence. One would think that people could come to experience a true sense of peace.

There are none so blind as those who will not see. It is not that they cannot, it is that they will not. It is a matter of choice.

Jesus is teaching that God is in charge, that all things come from God and that God is foremost a merciful God. In the story the only way to incur God's wrath is to live as though God does not exist. Even after our many mistakes, the divine landowner still reaches out to us with the precious son, whom of course we killed. Jesus is showing us how merciful and forgiving our God truly is.....

The most remarkable part of the story: The landowner SENT HIS SON????!!! If my employees had been murdered on the job, I would call the police and keep my son as far away as possible. But not this guy. It doesn't make sense. He has to be crazy or...?

From CHRISTIANITY REDISCOVERED by Vincent Donovan ...was a missionary to the Masai warrior tribe in Africa for a time. "Once I was sitting talking with a Masai elder about belief and unbelief...He pointed out that the word I used to convey "faith" was not a very satisfactory word in their language. It meant "to agree to." He said "to believe" like that was similar to a hunter shooting an animal with his gun from a great distance. Only his eyes and his fingers took part in the act. We should find another word. He said for a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death leap and the single blow to the neck with the front paw, the blow that actually kills.

And as the animal goes down the lion envelopes it in his arms, pulls it to himself and makes it a part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.

I looked at the elder in silence and amazement...But my wise teacher was not finished yet.

"We did not search you out, Padri," he said to me, "We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him, even leave our land and our people to find him. But we have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for him.

He has searched for us. He has searched US out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God."

We live in a vineyard we do not own, even if we think we do. And the son of the landowner comes to us, to say you can live and work here as long as you remember who the landlord and father is. How do you greet the son?

Lord, help us to know your lordship and greet your son as the true bearer of good news, that you love us and provide for us and help us to say no to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.