



Dear Friends and Parishioners,

The "vineyard" theme continues this Sunday as St Matthew continues his *season of parables*. "*In hearing the Word of God, the Church is built up and grows* says the Introduction to the Lectionary, "*and in the signs of the liturgical celebration, God's many wonderful past works in the history of salvation are symbolically presented anew. God in turn makes use of the assembly of the faithful who celebrate the liturgy in order that his Word may speed in triumph and his name be exalted among all peoples*".

The vineyard owner was probably one of the wealthy Romans who had vineyards in Israel at the time of Jesus. Since the vineyard owner may have been living abroad, native Palestinians had to look after the vineyard. Unfortunately, the tenants had the wrong attitude. When the owner sent servants to collect the produce of the vineyard, the tenants thrashed one, killed one and stoned the third. They did the same with the next group of servants and also killed the owner's son.

The tenants' problem was that they thought they owned the place, they were acting as if they could get the produce from the vineyard and forgot that they were working for the absentee owner living abroad and that the produce was his. Because of the mess their wrong attitude got them into, committing murder, the absentee owner would take the vineyard from their care and give it to others who would give him the produce.

So, what has this parable got to do with us? What is the vineyard now? The vineyard for us is everything God has given to us. The absentee vineyard owner is God himself. We are the tenants looking after the vineyard that God has given to us. What is our attitude to the vineyard? How am I tending the garden of life, which God has given me as a most precious gift?

Jesus delivers this stinging parable to the chief priests and scribes; they are the ones who have abused their status, so the reign of God will be taken away from them: that reign would be entrusted to the Church which he would found, but in the process he would himself become the son in the parable, he would go to the cross for the sake of truth and justice. He would be rejected as nothing, but would be for those who could see with eyes of faith, the very cornerstone of life.

The Church is a community for which all of us have a responsibility, for it has been for us a conduit of grace: the grace of baptism is both a gift and a call. That gift links us to each other, gives us an identity as children of God. The Liturgy calls us brothers and sisters, the scriptures call us the community of the saints. The song of the vineyard which Isaiah sings today is the song of our lives, the music of love and laughter, and the lament of struggle and hardship and sin which characterises our existence. The responsibility is that we work to make grace triumph over evil.

The key for this is Christ: his example, his self-giving and his risen life which affects us now. Here in the Liturgy he tends his Church, his vineyard; here he fences us round with love, digs a wine press of deep faith in our hearts, builds a tower of a vision of what life can really be like and gives it to us. So his eyes become our eyes, his work our work.

In the history of the Church, we have had those who have been seized, thrashed, and imprisoned because of their faith. Because they remained faithful, they were martyrs; others did the seizing and the thrashing, they were bad tenants: often their seizing and thrashing was just their apathy, their discontent, their forgetfulness.

The warning is that the vineyard, the grace of faith, the Church will be taken from us and God will create a new people. He calls us perhaps not so much to perfection as to faithfulness. When faith grows cold it must make his loving heart suffer.



People of all ages from across the diocese came together in St Mary's, Forebank Hall on Sunday 1 October to enjoy "*Oh I Do Like To Be Beside The*

Seaside" as Gary White expertly re-created the sound of the Mighty Wurlitzer Theatre Organ and entertained everyone with music to suit so many different tastes.

The hall was buzzing with delight as people enjoyed delicious home-baking at the interval, chatted about their favourite tunes and looked forward to the carefully curated, equally brilliant second half. It was a huge success and £1206 was raised for Mary's Meals and handed over to the charity's local volunteer lead, Benetta Johnston who clearly explained the background, the purpose and achievements of Mary's Meals which is now feeding over 2.5 million children every day at their place of education.