

Once there was a beet farmer in a small town. One day, as he was sitting in his favorite recliner watching the news, the weather man warned of a huge storm coming that would cause a lot of flooding and advised everyone in the low-lying areas to move to higher ground. The farmer lived in the valley, but he thought to himself, "I'm a man of faith, God will save me." Sure enough, the storm did come and pretty soon the water had reached up to his porch. Another beet farmer came by in a kayak and said, "Hop in, I'm headed to higher ground!" But he replied, "I am a man of faith, God will save me!"

Later on, the flood waters had risen all the way to the second floor. A person came by in a boat and said, "Jump in and I can take you to safety!" But once again, the farmer replied, "I'm a man of faith, God will save me!" Eventually, the flood rose all the way to his roof. A rescue worker flew by in a helicopter and lowered a ladder to the farmer, shouting, "Grab the ladder and everything will be ok!" As you can probably guess, he replied, "I'm a man of faith, God will save me."

Finally, the farmer died in the flood. When he got to Heaven, he asked Jesus, "Why didn't you save me? I am a man of faith!" Jesus replied, "I sent you a weather man, a kayak, a boat and a helicopter; what more do you want from me?"

Today Jesus wants to remind us not to misuse the gifts He has given us. When He tells the chief priests and the elders the parable about a landowner and his tenants, He is showing them how they are missing out on all the ways God speaks to them. God had sent the Jewish people countless prophets foretelling the coming of the Messiah, and now the Messiah had come. But not only were many of God's own people not willing to accept His messengers, now they were rejecting God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ!

This was all the more tragic because these were the people who *should* have been the best prepared to accept Him. The chief priests and the elders knew many of the words of the prophets by heart, but in their pride, they refused to see that Jesus was the fulfillment of those prophecies. So Jesus gives them this parable to highlight how stubborn they are in missing the Heavenly Father's message.

Jesus even shows them the true meaning of the prophecy about the cornerstone that the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone. He warns them that *they* are the builders of God's kingdom who are rejecting Him who is the cornerstone of the new people of God, the Church! Since they won't build upon Him, He tells them that the kingdom will be given to others who will. Given to others who will bear fruit; who will listen to Him and act on His words.

Brothers and sisters, how often in our lives do we find ourselves in the same trap as the chief priests and the elders? And we have been given even more than they were. Not only do we have the Word of God in sacred scripture, we also have the teachings of the Church, the Sacraments, and the example of the Saints! And beyond these wonderful sources of life, God puts people in our everyday lives to speak truth to us, but still we turn away.

This is not the way to live. Let us remember that our lives will remain unfulfilled unless they bear the fruit that God designed them to bear--fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the fruits of the Spirit that living in God and listening to Him should produce in us. God offers to tend our lives like the garden we hear about in the reading from Isaiah this morning. He breaks into the hard soil of our lives with the spade of His Word, to clear away the stones of our sin and selfishness. God pours His saving grace upon us like fertilizer, inviting us to be cultivated to produce excellent fruit like a choice vine in a vineyard.

Tragically, our lives sometimes bear wild grapes because we turn away from the plan of the One who has given so much. But there is always hope for restoration and renewal in the Father through His Son Jesus our Lord, and through the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. If we look into our own hearts and recognize a tangle of wild grapes and weeds growing, let us hear God as He lovingly says, "Let me clear these away so you can bear *good* fruit." Every time we allow God to touch us in the Mass, in our daily prayer, and through the people who show us how to live in His love, we become bearers of good fruit. Today, let us thank God for all of the ways He reaches into our lives to call us closer to him.

*Father, we bless your name and give you praise. We thank You for the ways you remind us of the great gifts you give us as Christian people. Help us to turn from our pride in all its forms so that we might better live in You. Give us hearts open to meeting You in the Sacraments. Open our ears to hear your voice in the scriptures and in the Church's teachings. Strengthen our hearts to follow your call and bear the fruit that you have made us to bear. Amen.*