

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 8 OCTOBER 2023 - TRINITY 18

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 80.9-17

- 9 You brought a vine out of Egypt; ♦
you drove out the nations and planted it.
- 10 You made room around it, ♦
and when it had taken root, it filled the land.
- 11 The hills were covered with its shadow ♦
and the cedars of God by its boughs.
- 12 It stretched out its branches to the Sea ♦
and its tendrils to the River.
- 13 Why then have you broken down its wall, ♦
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- 14 The wild boar out of the wood tears it off, ♦
and all the insects of the field devour it.
- 15 Turn again, O God of hosts, ♦
look down from heaven and behold;
- 16 Cherish this vine which your right hand has planted, ♦
and the branch that you made so strong for yourself.
- 17 Let those who burnt it with fire, who cut it down, ♦
perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians, chapter 3, verses 4b-14

I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia! Alleluia!

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our mind,
so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 21: 33-46.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said, 'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes"?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

A Reflection from Peter ...

In recent years we've heard some pretty terrible stories from different sports where young people have been exploited, mistreated and sexually abused. One of the things that makes the stories so painful is that we know just how hard the young people have worked to get there in the first place; just how deeply they long to succeed and make it to the top. They have put their trust in coaches and trainers, only to be let down. All sport demonstrates something of that passionate commitment and belonging. St Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, takes up the sporting theme. He says 'I press on towards the goal for the prize...' For Paul too there is the one figure who stands out, the one who has so impressed Paul that he has committed himself to this long and difficult journey. 'I press on to make the goal my own,' he says, 'because Christ has made me his own.' The difference here is twofold. First, the emphasis is on the commitment God in Christ has made to Paul, a commitment that is wholly good, healthy and loving. Secondly, this is not about some aspect of life – a sport, or musical skill – but about the whole of life, the whole of who Paul is. As he puts it, 'I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'

When we turn to our Gospel reading this week we find the painful parable of the vineyard. Here the tables are turned. It's not the powerful coach exploiting the youngsters, but the tenants turning on the owner. Even with the evidence of their violence before him, the owner still has hope and trust and sends his own son. But, blinded by their own greed, they kill him and the end is surely disaster for everyone. However, Jesus uses the parable to help us understand how unlike us God is. The parable may end in disaster in the world's terms. The corruption of governments, the greed of people smugglers, the callous treatment of migrants – all these are disasters, but God is not deflected; God's purpose is not thwarted because "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes" God does something we could not have imagined. God raises Jesus from the dead and gave him glory – and so gives us lasting hope and joy.