

## **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent 2016 – St Thomas**

*The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.*

### **Text: Luke 20: 9 – 20**

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus went on to tell the people (the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders) this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. <sup>10</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.*

<sup>13</sup> *“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ <sup>14</sup> “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over.*

*‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ <sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*

<sup>16</sup> *He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”*

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “‘the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”*

<sup>19</sup> *The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.*

<sup>20</sup> *Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.*

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, as human beings, we often tend to have a problem with you and with your message. This is especially so, when we find that you wouldn’t fit into our plans for life here on earth. When our plans get prioritised above yours’, disaster is imminent! For this very reason, you were murdered on the cross! Lord, we pray, grant us, who have been baptised into your name, faith, that we may gladly put you and the salvation, which you have won for us on that cross first, in all that we plan and do! Come now, dear Lord and bless our speaking and also our hearing. Amen.*

In the Name of our Lord and Saviour, dear friends

Jesus of Nazareth, at his time, was indeed a very controversial figure in the Nation, Israel! On the one side, as you will hear next week, there was the triumphal entry, where Jesus, just a day or two before this incident in our text took place, had ridden into the City of Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey. On that occasion He had been accompanied by hundreds, maybe even thousands of ordinary people, singing and shouting his praise, including the well-known words from Psalm 118, namely, “*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!*” And: “*Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*” And now, just a few days later, we hear the exact opposite, coming from the leaders of Israel, namely: “*The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.*”

It seems to have been a matter of: *“Love him or hate him,”* as we even find it to be in the modern day world of sport stars, American politicians, etc. The pity is that even though the choice is ours, in the case of Jesus, the consequences for those on the negative side of this equation, are indeed devastating! As we did read in the verses 17 & 18 of our text: Jesus looked directly at them and asked, *“Then what is the meaning of that which is written (Psalm 118): “the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”*

Dear friends, what a devastating warning! But it’s true! Those who oppose or disregard God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, for whatever reason, will have to suffer the consequences of their decision! At this point it is however also important for us to see the other side of this specific ‘coin’, so to speak! Jesus did not utter these words of warning, as a mere threat or as an act of revenge against His opponents! Just like his prophecy about the destruction of the City of Jerusalem in next Sunday’s sermon text, which he made only about two days before, and therefore in the same context, he did so under tears of sadness! A week or three ago, we already heard Jesus crying over the City, telling them about his efforts to gather them, and especially also those same leaders of our text, under his wings, like a hen would do with her chicks, in the face of danger. But, they had actively rejected his efforts!

Historically, the ruling council of the people of Israel, officially known as the Sanhedrin, had been brought about some time after the collapse of the monarchy, some 400 years before. It is a well-known fact that they, over the years, had developed a large number of man-made rules and laws, about 630, or so, which they were guarding absolutely vehemently. Everybody had to obey these regulations to the very letter, or face punishment, even up to death by stoning! To them these rules had practically replaced God’s Law, even though the initial intention was, that they should have kept the people from breaking the Law of God, given to them through Moses. Over and above, those extra rules had actually given the members of the Sanhedrin an unassailable position of power over the ordinary people. Abuse and corruption were rife, and the level of hypocrisy among those leaders, was frightening.

Their animosity against Jesus came merely from the fact that He had repeatedly exposed them and all their underhand dealings! But, instead of them repenting and returning back to the true worship, demanded by God in His Law, they saw Jesus only as a threat to their cushy position of self-enrichment and of their position of power over the people. And so their resentment quickly developed into outright hatred, which brought them to the decision that Jesus had to be killed! Either Him, or us, was their verdict, and obviously, from their perspective, He had to be removed from society!

Dear friends, in our day and age, where *“everything goes”*, many people are also actively subscribing to a *“god of love”* who would never take any drastic action against mankind! This god would also always give his nod of approval on all their plans and actions. And so, they have fabricated for themselves, some kind of religiousness, like a cloud on which they are floating, seemingly disconnected from life and all its harsh realities. And so, they are very quick to press the *‘delete’* button on a text like the one we have before us this morning. *“God forbid!”* is an age old reaction, which still is as modern, as we all would like to be! But, because of this modern day approach, people are actually in danger of missing out on the love of the true God!

Out of love, Jesus over and over again, invited these leaders of Israel, to come under His wing and be saved! Out of love, Jesus did bring the ultimate sacrifice, when he died on the

cross, so that we, and all the people of this world, might receive forgiveness of all our sins, and be saved! Out of love, He makes us righteous before God and grants us the sanctification, which we need, to live as His children here on earth! Out of love, He makes us members of His body, so that we may regularly receive the '*nourishment*', His Word and Sacrament, which we need to sustain our faith and our trust in Him!

Yes, dear friends, it is only because of His love, that we are gathered here this morning! Here He wants to grant us the ability to love Him and to believe in Him, so that we will be saved! And, because of God's love towards us, and all people, He wants us to go out now into this world to make disciples of all the people out there. Let us go and proclaim God's love by the way we treat those who work for us; those who live close to us, and even the strangers, whom we meet on the highways and the byways of life! Always remember that one kind deed, one little sign of friendliness, can be as effective as 1000 spoken words. And, unfortunately, the opposite also is true!

May God therefore grant us His Spirit of peace and kindness, as we go out into the world, when we just now are leaving His house. Amen.

We pray: Lord God, your plan of salvation has been implemented, in spite of people's resistance. We pray that you would grant us faith and courage to go out and spread the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, crucified. Bless us and those who see and hear us, acting out your great commission! And the peace of God, which is way above all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, for life everlasting. Amen.