

Lent 5C, 2010

Text: Luke 20:9-20

Title: Being what God Made You to Be

+ INI +

Three weeks in a row- three parables.

Three different stories, but all very similar.

Two weeks ago it was the fig tree that didn't bear fruit.

Last week it was the two sons, one who left and came back home, and the other who didn't welcome back his brother when he returned.

This week it's the rebellious tenants, who don't pay the rent and murder those who come to collect it.

Each week the stories get stronger, more intense as we come closer and closer to Holy Week. The players get a little more rebellious and push the envelope a little further.

With the fig tree, the problem was the fig tree wasn't bearing fruit. It wasn't sick, it wasn't dying, it wasn't an evil tree, it just wasn't fruitful. The fig tree was like folks are nice, good people, but just don't do the good thing that God created them to do.

With the two sons, they were acting selfish they were tearing apart their family, but they weren't physically harming any one. They were engaging in self-destructive behavior, and they were breaking their Father's heart, but they hadn't resorted to violence.

And with now the tenants, it's not just the fact that they aren't doing any good. It's not that just the fact that they are messing up their own lives. These tenants resort to murder and theft to accomplish their goals. They are in open rebellion against the owner, their landlord.

The fig tree has not borne any fruit for three years, and yet it gets another year.

The younger son has squandered his inheritance, and yet he is welcomed back with open arms. The older son is being selfish and won't come inside, and yet the Father comes out to him and pleads with him to come in.

The tenants have beat up three of the owner's servants, and yet He still sends His Son to try one more time.

Each of these are pictures of the Lord's patience. He does not want to cut down the tree. He does not want His sons to remain outside His house. He does not want to have to evict the tenants.

In all three cases- the fig tree, the two sons, and the tenants, these folks were not content, they weren't happy being who God made them to be; and they all had the same root sin- selfishness.

The fig tree did not want to be a fig tree. The owner had planted the tree to bear fruit, but the fig tree refused. It wanted to be a shade tree. It wanted to keep all the nutrients from the soil to itself, rather than bearing fruit and helping to make more trees.

The sons were not content being sons. They wanted to be fathers. They wanted to be in control. The younger son wanted to be independent and live on his own, by his own rules. The older son wanted to control who lived in his Father's house. He wanted to tell His father They weren't content being sons.

The tenants were not content being tenants. They wanted to own the land themselves. They did not want to pay the owner of the vineyard what was rightfully his.

So we have three cases of rebellion. Three stories about folks who do not want to be who the Lord has made them to be.

That is so often our problem, too. We are not content being who God has made us to be. We are selfish, just like the fig tree, the sons, and the tenants. We want to be in control, in charge of our lives.

We are like the tenants. Nothing that we have belongs to us, but we like to think that it does. This is my money, Lord, and I don't have to give you anything. This is my time, Lord, and I'm going to spend it doing what I want. This is my life, Lord, and I'm going to live the way I want. You don't have any right to tell me what to do.

In our lives, we try to make the Lord our tenant. We allow Jesus to rent a room in our lives, under certain conditions. As long as He doesn't inconvenience us, He keeps to Himself, He doesn't bother us, and does a few things to help out around the house- a few small miracles every now and then, we're okay with having Him around. We might even go to Him for advice when we're confused or look to Him to cheer us up when we're down. But it's always on our terms.

We like to be able to control our encounters with Jesus. We come to church when we're good and ready. We read God's Word when we decide that we have time and can fit it into our schedule. But we always want to have the final say.

As soon as Jesus starts acting like He's actually the one in charge, then we start thinking about evicting Him, or at least sending Him to His room for awhile. We want to show Him who's the boss.

But the truth is, we're only tenants. It's not a bad thing, but it's who we are, who God has made us to be.

When the leaders of the people heard the parable of the tenants, they know that Jesus is speaking about them. And ironically, they do just what Jesus said they would do. In a few short days, they will take the beloved Son, throw Him outside of the vineyard, and kill Him.

Jesus is coming. The Son of the landlord is coming. He came to the people of Israel, and He comes to us.

What will your reaction be? Will you welcome Him and give Him what is rightfully His, or will you seek to get rid of Him and keep everything for yourself?