



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Matthew 21: 33-46

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went away. 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. Then 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,'^[a]
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 its fruits. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."^[b]

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.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

According to Indian Jesuit priest, Anthony de 'Mello, true service cannot be done as a calculated investment to build a resume or gain status. In his philosophy when you truly awaken and become aware, love and service flow out of you naturally, without the need for

logic, recognition, or rigid command. Here is a parable he uses called “The Shades are Down” from his little life changing book, “The Way to Love.”

“A group of tourists sits in a bus that is passing through gorgeously beautiful country, lakes and mountains and green fields and rivers. But the shades of the bus are pulled down. They do not have the slightest idea of what lies beyond the windows of the bus. And all the time of their journey is spent in squabbling over who will have the seat of honor in the bus, who will be applauded, who will be well considered. And so, they remain, till the journey's end.

As a young Christian I became intrigued with reformed theology. I was attracted to the Westminster Confession of Faith. When I read the statement “our chief aim in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever,” the enjoy God part sounded right in my wheelhouse. Wasn't sure I could glorify God, but I was pretty sure I could enjoy God.

I am not a reformed theology guy today. My own personal theology does not align with the gospel of exclusivity. Nevertheless, I have re-worked the line in the Westminster confession of faith that our chief aim in life is to glorify God and enjoy *him* forever. My version for my own life is this, “our chief aim in life is to be a participant in God's divine nature.”

One way to interpret the parables of Jesus and De Mello is being about leadership. Leadership that gets blinded by ego, status and internal politics or what is called the seat of honor, entirely missing the greater purpose and reality of the journey. A journey some are called to guide others through.

One of the things that I love about being a spiritual director, is stated on a piece of wood hanging above my office door entrance at Spirit in the Desert, it says “the ministry of walking with.” I am called to accompany someone on their faith journey and watch them raise the shades on their bus.

To me this is what it means to glorify God and enjoy God forever. I was called to these moments on the Wednesday respite.

Jesus rode the bus with his disciples and watched them come alive as they raised the shades on their journey. Seeing outside of themselves and awakening to everything beyond their world, both the beauty of nature and the suffering of people, the laughter of children and the sadness of the orphan.

A leader who is also a servant understands that jostling for recognition in this life is a part of the human condition. A natural trait of the ego. A servant who is also a leader in the world understands this because of their own human nature.

The desire to be seen and known is a natural part of being a soul-breathing human. In my opinion, it is what drives social media. Every picture, every post cries “look at me.” This is

not a condemnation but a caution. I too, use the mechanisms of social media, even as I speak! But a servant who happens to also lead, will redirect the gaze of its “followers” and guide others to raise the shades of their journey on “The Way.”

Jesus was not bashful about saying look at me or listen to me, but he also redirected their gaze by saying, “I do nothing but in accordance with the will of my father who is in heaven” or the one who is greater than me. The humility of Jesus raised the shades of others so they may gaze outward and away from their lives of selfish ambition.

How often we accuse others of having a big ego. But guys, truth be told, no one has a small ego. We all must battle daily, even hourly, with our fearful ego attempting to protect us from failure, disappointment, suffering, and loss. The ego tries to prevent us from being last and not getting our way, then once again, from avoiding suffering and conflict. We then are left to our own devices (both metaphorically and literally) for escape and emotional withdrawal.

We become addicted to a drug more dangerous than alcohol and heroin. The addiction to the thrill of power, popularity and prestige. More dangerous because they are rewarded in our culture rather than seen as symptoms of addiction. It doesn’t begin with a drug violently injected into ourselves, it begins with our ego injecting our way into the culture around us. There is a better way.

Maybe it is about living the paradoxes Jesus taught. Perhaps a person cannot experience radical grace unless they take the radical risk of open humility. Maybe a person cannot experience freedom until they become enslaved by God’s unconditional love. Maybe a person cannot find genuine peace until they stop trying to fashion their own peace. Perhaps a person cannot be a leader until they become a servant but not like the wicked tenants in the parable. A servant who understands they were sent by the only true landowner to tend the vineyard as stewards, working together without producing sour grapes. This land is not my land, and this land is not your land. There is only one landowner and one God, and we are its tenants.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am not God

AMEN