

Lent 5            March 13, 2016  
Text:            Luke 20:9-20  
Theme:          "Back to the Basics"

**Some of my pastoral colleagues think that I have a rather child- like faith. See,I believe the Bible. I believe in the 6 day creation. I believe that Adam and Eve were real people. I believe that Jonah really was swallowed by a great fish. I believe that God is in control and we get in the way of our own blessings because of our abilities to manipulate life through science. But having said all of that, I don't want to argue about any of it. It seems as though the Church spends too much time arguing about the wild things Christians believe by faith and not enough time talking about the faith by which we believe all those wild things.**

**The bottom line is that I am an intelligent, rational man who believes irrational things and looks stupid to people who believe that they have grown past those irrational beliefs in the same way we no longer believe that the world is flat or that the earth is stationary as the sun revolves around it. How does an otherwise at least moderately intelligent, seemingly rational man end up believing that there is a super power out there in the universe who is able to speak matter into being and bring forth water from a rock?**

**In our Gospel for today, Jesus was in town for the last week of his life and as usual he was teaching. The religious leaders wanted**

**to know by what authority he taught what he taught and instead of answering them, he told them a parable.**

**“A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”**

**“‘What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.’ When they heard this, they said, ‘Surely not!’”**

**“But he looked directly at them and said, ‘what then is this that is written:’ ‘the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? ‘Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.’”**

**It was not a very thickly veiled story either. Clearly God is the owner of the vineyard and the religious leaders are the caretakers and the prophets are the servants sent to collect the rent and Jesus himself is the son who, later that week, they will drag outside of Jerusalem flog him and crucify him on Golgotha.**

**It is a simple parable. Either you have faith in the son or you do not. If you do, you are part of the father's house and if you don't, you will be crushed by the cornerstone and cast out into the darkness where the fire is not quenched and the worm never dies. Rather than arguing about peripheral teachings, let's be more concerned with that little nugget. If you have faith in Christ, you are part of the Father's house for eternity and if you do not have faith in Christ, you will be crushed and cast out. That little nugget is the center of all Christian teaching and Satan likes to distract us from the essential teaching with peripheral issues that do not impact salvation.**

**There are three types of people:**

**There are solid, well-nourished Christians who are actively pursuing the Lord's will by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone they can find.**

**There are weak, malnourished Christians are part of the family but are so weak in faith and consumed by worldly ideas that they are barely hanging on to the grace of God themselves much less trying to proclaim that grace to unbelievers.**

**Then there are non-Christians who deny Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that they will be sent to Hell. Jesus says in Mathew 10,**

**“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”**  
**And in John 14,**

**“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” So that’s that. The way to heaven is through a relationship with the Son of God, the creator of this vineyard in which we live. You don’t have to like that answer but it is the answer that the Bible gives us. Now having said that, it is not my job to determine who has a relationship with Christ. I cannot see another person’s heart so you will never hear me say that a specific person or group of people will go to Hell. How do you go to Hell? By rejecting and denying Jesus Christ. Who does that? I do not and cannot know because I cannot see another person’s heart. So will atheists and agnostics, Jews and Muslims, Hindus and secular humanists all go to Hell? Don’t know. Not my job to make that call.**

**There are many people walking this earth who are very relieved that that decision is several steps above my pay grade.**

**So we don't waste our time arguing about that which only God can know. Our mission as the keepers of the vineyard is to strengthen weak Christians and proclaim our faith to non-Christians. That's it. We don't need to argue about the viability of a fetus. We don't need to argue about who should be sleeping with whom. We need to tell people that God loves them as they are right now. He sent his son to die on the cross for them, to pay for all their sins. They are loved and forgiven. That's stuff the Holy Spirit can use to strengthen weak faith and to even create faith where there is none.**

**Do I personally believe that the world was created in six days? Yes, I do. I believe it on the basis of the Hebrew grammar and sequences used in Genesis one and two and the fundamental similarities in all cultural creation epics. But that will not help the non-Christian. The Holy Spirit has not promised to work through Hebrew grammar lessons. He has promised to work through the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus Christ suffered hell for you personally. That is to say that if you were the only person left on earth, he would still have died for you. That's how much he loved you personally. The Holy Spirit can work with that. He can make a Christian out of that.**