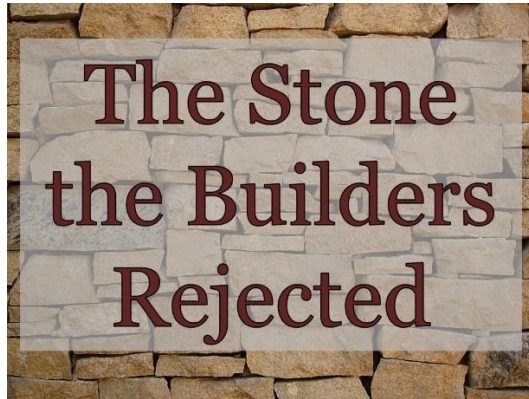


19TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OCTOBER 8, 2023



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

ONE: The God who frees us invites us to worship.

The God of aw welcomes our loyal response.

MANY: The heavens are telling the glory of God.

The firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

ONE: God is present with us, eager to speak to us.

Our Creator is here to test us and to keep us from sin.

MANY: The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul.

God's decrees are sure, making wise the simple.

ONE: We tremble before God, yet are not afraid.

We are ready to listen to God's word.

MANY: May our awe before God be pure and enduring.

May our thoughts and words be acceptable to God.

*PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

O God, our rock and our redeemer, enlighten us today through the ancient witness of your faithful people.

Lead us to desire the guidance of your word. Remind us of your ordinances that are true and righteous

altogether. May they shape our living and warn us when

we are in error. We seek to honor your name, to divest ourselves of idols, to keep this day of rest and worship.

Work with us to develop right relationships in our

families and with all your children near and far, we pray

in Jesus' name. Amen.

*CALL TO CONFESSION:

We are tenants to whom God has leased some of the earth's wealth. God comes among us to collect what we

have produced, to claim a portion of all that is God's

own. Our Creator seeks an accounting of our

faithfulness to the way of the life designed for us. Let us

seek forgiveness for our shortcomings.

*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

O God, we have no righteousness of our own. We have bent and ignored your law. Your commandments inform us but do not transform. We give lip service to your law but seek to avoid its implication for our lives. We recognize some of our errors, but many are hidden from us. We devote our energies to accumulating possessions that function as idols in our lives. We depend on them more than we honor you. Save us, we pray, from great transgressions and help us to reorder our days. Amen.

Silence

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of God upon you so that you do not sin.” The One who orders all worlds seeks to bring order and joyous freedom into our lives. To fear God is to open our eyes to the amazing vastness of God’s dominion and to the astonishing awareness that God knows each one of us, loves us, and has a purpose for us. Let God reign among us!

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

The Ten Commandments

20 Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You must have no other gods before me. ⁴ Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth.

⁷ Do not use the LORD your God’s name as if it were of no significance; the LORD won’t forgive anyone who uses his name that way. ⁸ Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. ⁹ Six days you may work and do all your tasks,

¹² Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ Do not kill.

¹⁴ Do not commit adultery.

¹⁵ Do not steal.

¹⁶ Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.

¹⁷ Do not desire and try to take your neighbor’s house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

¹⁸ When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the horn, and the mountain smoking, the people shook with fear and stood at a

distance. ¹⁹ They said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we’ll listen. But don’t let God speak to us, or we’ll die.”

²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you don’t sin.”

EPISTLE LESSON: Philippians 3:4b-14

The Words of Paul

⁴ though I have good reason to have this kind of confidence. If anyone else has reason to put their confidence in physical advantages, I have even more:

⁵ I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin.

I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

With respect to observing the Law, I’m a Pharisee.

⁶ With respect to devotion to the faith, I harassed the church.

With respect to righteousness under the Law, I’m blameless.

⁷ These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him. In Christ I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from

the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith. ¹⁰ The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the participation in his sufferings. It includes being conformed to his death ¹¹ so that I may perhaps reach the goal of the resurrection of the dead.

¹² It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. ¹⁴ The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 21:33-46**

Parable of the tenant farmers

³³ “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower. Then he rented it to tenant farmers and took a trip. ³⁴ When it was time for harvest, he sent his servants to the tenant farmers to collect his fruit. ³⁵ But the tenant farmers grabbed his servants. They beat some of them, and some of them they killed. Some of them they stoned to death.

³⁶ “Again he sent other servants, more than the first group. They treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸ “But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come on, let’s kill him and we’ll have his inheritance.’ ³⁹ They grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

⁴⁰ “When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?”

⁴¹ They said, “He will totally destroy those wicked farmers and rent the vineyard to other tenant farmers who will give him the fruit when it’s ready.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Haven’t you ever read in the scriptures, *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it’s amazing in our eyes?* ⁴³ Therefore, I tell you that God’s kingdom will be taken away from you and will be given to a people who produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Whoever falls on this stone will be crushed. And the stone will crush the person it falls on.”

⁴⁵ Now when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard the parable, they knew Jesus was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They were trying to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, who thought he was a prophet.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Rejection”

Today we continue the teachings of Jesus by way of parables. There is much to learn from these parables, but today I want to focus on the theme of “rejection”. And we can find rejection in all of these passages.

For example, on September 10 we read the instructions concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. Some people reject any measures for reconciliation. No one can convince them that they may not be correct, they refuse to compromise.

On September 17 we heard the teaching of Jesus about forgiveness and he presented us with the well-known parable of the unforgiving servant. The servant rejected the idea of forgiveness when it concerned others even when he had been forgiven. The consequences were not good for him.

On September 24 Jesus told us the parable concerning the land owner who paid all the workers the same amount even if they had worked less time. The workers rejected this way of doing business. They refused to be happy with what they received. After all the land owner didn’t have to hire them at all.

Last week our reading showed Jesus teaching about doing the will of God. He told the parable concerning the

two sons, one who said he would but didn't and the other said he wouldn't but did. Jesus compared the sons to how the message of repentance and bearing of fruit from John the Baptize was received. The tax collectors and prostitutes received John's message and repented. The chief priests and elders rejected John's message and continued to be hypocrites pretending to be righteous while continuing to treat others harshly.

Today's parable, the most violent, the tenants rejected the servants of the householder and eventually killing the son of the householder. They didn't want to share any of the grape harvest and eventually received nothing.

These parables and stories are between Jesus and the chief priests and elders of the people. Jesus is quizzed about his authority and his credentials, and he responds with a question concerning their opinion of John's authority. Jesus points out that the real issue is not his authority but the response of his interrogators to his preaching and that of John, which called for repentance and the bearing of fruit appropriate to the kingdom of God.

(I'd like to pause here for a moment to explain about the term "bearing of fruit." Here is a quote from the New Living Translation of the Bible. Matthew 7:17-20. "The believer's spiritual life and growth are often compared to

a fruit-bearing tree in Scripture. Just as fruit production is proof of life and health in a tree, so are good actions the evidence of spiritual life in Jesus Christ and the presence of God's Spirit dwelling within a person. Jesus said, "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions" (Matthew 7:17-20, NLT). In another context it states, "Fruit in keeping with repentance represents the good deeds and changed behaviors that naturally flow from a truly repentant and transformed heart.")

In every parable we have read recently, someone is rejecting something and when they do, the consequences are not pleasant. The tenants in the last parable are thrown out. However, unless the new tenants (and Christians are tenants, not owners) bear fruit, the vineyard may again be transferred to someone else. The owner of the vineyard is still expecting righteous living, human caring, and courageous witnessing, these three being Matthew's understanding of "fruit."

The stone that was rejected by many people becomes the stone of God, the cornerstone of God's work. Jesus'

role is decisive; he is, in a sense, the crisis of the word. He is not to be dealt with casually as just another religious figure. To encounter Christ is to face a moment of truth; life's Yes and No are at stake.

Another lesson for us on our journey. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

We seek you, O God, and make supplication to you not only for ourselves but our neighbors, whom you have commanded us to love as we love ourselves. Revitalize your church and every mission to serv the world. May we be your eyes to see human need, your ears to hear cries for help, your hands to gently touch and support the weak, your feet to go wherever we are needed. May your church in the world remain strong to do your will on earth as it is done in heaven.

Cornerstone of the Church, remind us of who you are, that we may never reject you and your claims for our reverence and obedience, made known by prophets and apostles, who with us are built into an abiding structure for your service.

As we leave our gifts and offer our prayers before your feet, O God, grant that first we may be reconciled to our brothers and sisters that our offerings and intercessions may be sincere and worthy of your hearing. We commend to your keeping all those dear to us by ties of

blood and the unity of the Spirit. Give angels charge over them to guard them in all their ways.

Compassionate Christ, give rest to those who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. Cool the fevered brow, heal the sick, mend the broken body or spirit, deliver those in trouble, forgive the sinning who look to you for grace. Be with those on our prayer list that they may be relieved of their struggle for heath and wholeness.

We praise you, O Lord, with all our hearts and voices and bless your holy name, for you have saved us from destruction and rescued us in time of trouble. May your Holy Spirit remain with us until life eternal.

All these intercessions we pray in the name of God's Son, Jesus, as we pray together. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

God has planted a vineyard on this tiny planet we call home. The earth has been blessed with vast resources

entrusted to our care. What is produced by our care-taking is not our own but is rightfully claimed by God for the benefit of all. It is the fruit of God's realm that we share today.

***UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

Ruler of all space and time, we want to be faithful stewards in your vineyard. All that we have is yours. Our lives are in your hands. Help us to use well all that we here devote to the work of your church. Help us to manage well, to your honor and glory, all that we retain for ourselves. May we know heaven on earth because you hold first place in our priorities and our daily goal is to serve you. Amen.

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

ONE: With eyes enlightened, go forth to serve with joy.
With hearts made pure, pass on God's love.

**MANY: With souls revived, we go out rejoicing.
God's law has revealed to us God's love and
care.**

ONE: All that we have gained is a gift from God.
What is most important is not things, but Christ.

**MANY: We seek to gain Christ within the church
community. We dwell together in Christ's
body, the church.**

ONE: Seek the growth of this body, for Christ's sake.
Bring others to dwell here, for their sakes.

MANY: We will press on toward our heavenly call.

**Our resurrection faith gives us hope.
Amen. Amen.**