

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

4 October 2020—Harvest Festival

Given that we know the vineyard and the tenants are meant to represent God's kingdom and its leaders, there is something else at play here. There is a tenancy agreement, or as we otherwise know it, a covenant, in place. Tithes are expected to be paid, the landowner is expected to be honoured, and yet the religious leaders of the day had largely misused what they had entrusted to them and had led the people astray. 'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' Jesus' conclusion here is taken as open criticism by the chief priests and Pharisees. The place of Jesus as the Son of the landowner is clear too, as is the foreshadowing of the church taking over from where the Jewish people had left off. Or is it? Notice that it is the leaders, the tenants, that are rebuked. The disciples and the first "Christians", as they became known, were mostly Jews. So this isn't so much about a change of regime or culture, but more about the rightful recognition of the Son of God, who now comes to collect the fruit of his Father's harvest. This story tells us as much about Jesus as it does about the rotten tenants. The foreshadowing that we see is that of the cross, for the Son of God will be beaten and killed. But that is where the plan of the wicked tenants falls short, for death is not the end and far from losing his inheritance it is divided among all his heirs.

Other Tenants. It is good to remember that we are leaseholders not freeholders in this life. What we have, we hold for a season. There is a challenge here to use what we have wisely, to remember that we are but temporary custodians and to pass it on in good or better shape. The way we behave flows from what we believe; and the new covenant agreement sealed in the Son's blood compels us to be wise tenants, doing good, seeking justice, building good relationships and working towards the wellbeing of all that God has made.

SUGGESTED SONG

We Plough The Fields And Scatter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha628Pj_Rns

BLESSING

'The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.' (Zechariah 8:12-13)

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

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>

Dear Friends,

One of the really useful things about Facebook is that it occasionally reminds you of things you did in the past. So, this week I was reminded that exactly five years ago I was in Jerusalem as the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot was being celebrated. This year Sukkot is from 2 to 9 October. This is one of the Jewish harvest festivals and also another time when the Exodus from Egypt is remembered. As we travelled throughout Israel we saw that there were shelters, or sukka, erected outside homes and on roof terraces and balconies. Families spend as much time as possible in these shelters, eating, living and socialising, during the festival period. Good-natured crowds gathered, celebrating, in the public square beneath the Western Wall. Market stalls throughout the Old City overflowed with the harvest of the land, and there were more pomegranates than I had seen in my life before. Being there at this special time really added to a memorable experience.

Our Gospel reading today takes place around harvest time. A landowner has planted a vineyard, around which he puts a wall, and within which he digs a winepress and builds a watchtower. We

saw all these things on our travels around the country. The vineyard has been let to tenants, and when landowner sends his servants to harvest the grapes they are abused, mistreated and killed. This happens twice, before the landowner sends his son with the expectation that he would be welcomed and treated with respect—but he was not.

Vineyards are a theme running through our readings today. Appropriately for Sukkot, Psalm 80 acknowledges that God has "transplanted a vine from Egypt", a direct link to the Exodus, and also referencing its broken walls and its much-needed watchtower.

The vineyard represents God's chosen people, his holy nation, as is made clear in Isaiah's passionate love song about the vines planted on a fertile hillside which did not produce good grapes, only bad. Isaiah's powerfully prophetic poetry sees the walls being destroyed and the uncultivated land being overtaken by weeds and waste. So, when Jesus comes to tell his "Parable of the Tenants" he is treading fertile ground that is rich with already well-understood imagery. There is no mistaking what Jesus is talking about, and for that he will inevitably pay the price.

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet during this time, and will continue to be the main way we will meet for some time to come, with increased Covid-19 precautions now being put in place. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 11am, for today only, and our Zoom Monday Prayer Meeting is at 7.00pm tomorrow. If you are able to join us, you will be welcome. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There is more at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

CALL TO WORSHIP

Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. You transplanted a vine from Egypt... You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land... Return to us, God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. (Psalm 80:7-9,14-15)

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 80:7-15](#)

[Isaiah 5:1-7](#)

[Matthew 21:33-46](#)

SUGGESTED SONG

Great Is Thy Faithfulness
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o>

PRAYER

Lord of the Harvest, we come to you today to thank and praise you for the fruitfulness of your creation, and the many blessings of this earth that you have given us to share and to enjoy. At a time that has been so challenging for so many, we particularly pray for those who have found it most difficult over the last few months, and we pray for the work of our local Councils and the various statutory and voluntary agencies in meeting people's needs. We pray especially for the Isle of Wight Food Bank, so dependent on our generosity and needing to find alternative supplies due to the number of harvest festivals not happening in schools and churches this year. Help us to be generous, and to be good stewards of all that you have given us, the planet and its resources; and help us in the practical task of loving our neighbour as ourself. Amen.

OPERATION CHAD

If you have read the article in Engage, the BMS World Mission magazine, or watched the video on today's page on our website, you will be inspired by the amazing things that take place in the Guinebor II (G2) hospital in Chad, described as BMS World Mission's beacon of hope in the hostile Sahel desert. There are some amazing stories, among them the Hospital Director, Kalbassou Doubassou. "Kalbassou performs up to six operations a day—as well as leading

weekly all-staff meetings, praying by patient bedsides, and making operational decisions (an especially fraught job with the worrying arrival of the Coronavirus in Chad in the spring of this year). Often, he's woken in the night to perform an emergency C-section, and still manages to be back on his feet for the next morning's ward rounds." We pray for the G2 hospital, its amazing work, and how we can support BMS World Mission in raising the more than £240,000 a year it costs to keep it open.

SUGGESTED SONGS

Come As You Are
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnZrRunTjil>

Praise Is Rising
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMBDWG9tseU>

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Two Places At Once. One of the challenges of a traditional Harvest Festival in many churches these days is that we try to do two things at the same time, and sometimes it feels as if we struggle to do justice to either or both. On the one hand we want to join in with God's people down through the millennia, for which we see so many examples and so much inspiration in the Bible, to thank God for the bounty of creation and for the generosity of the harvest that he has promised will always follow on from seedtime! On the other hand we quite

properly use the time to take the focus away from ourselves towards practical mission overseas. At Ryde Baptist Church we have a practice of alternating each year between a project supported by BMS World Mission and a project supported by Tear Fund. This works well but it sometimes feels like there is a conflict of focus for our attention.

One And The Same Place. In reality, of course, these are two sides of the same coin. God has placed us on this planet to look after it and to share the cornucopic bounty it regularly bestows. We cannot truly be grateful to God and celebrate another good harvest, if we do not also ensure that the provisions that we enjoy are also shared equitably, particularly with those in most need. We shouldn't limit our understanding of harvest to just foodstuff, but we also need to consider the harvest of the environment, health care, justice, and economic development. If we are going to pray "for what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly grateful" we cannot do so with our eyes closed in denial of those things that are happening around the world, even close to where we are.

The Tenancy Agreement. One of the things that is not clear in the Parable of the Tenants is the reason for the landowner sending his servants and then his son to collect his harvest. After all, there are tenants occupying the vineyard. Didn't they have a right to the grapes?