

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

Jaw-dropping twist: This landowner's patience will shock you!

³³ “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. He leased it out to some tenant farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the time approached to harvest the fruit, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ The tenant farmers seized his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then the landowner sent even more servants than the first time. The tenant farmers treated them 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, let’s kill him and take his inheritance!’ ³⁹ They took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ So when the landowner comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?”

⁴¹ They told him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end. Then he will lease out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his fruit when it is due.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?

⁴³ “That is why I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruit.

—Matthew 21:33-43

Did I get you to click on the link? Are you familiar with clickbait article titles? Clickbait is the term used to talk about article titles that are intended to grab someone’s attention with sensationalized or even falsified information in the title. The intention behind a clickbait article title is to provide a ‘teaser’ that exploits the ‘curiosity gap,’ thus leading the reader to click on the link which directs him to the article. Often, clickbait articles do not meet the level of expectation built by the title.

Today, we continue in the worship series, Tell Us a Story. As we are confronted with another story that Jesus told, a parable, we see that this title is not sensationalized. The story that Jesus tells is really that shocking. When we look at this story, the actions of the landowner are truly a jaw-dropping twist from what we would expect.

Hopefully, this ‘teaser’ for the sermon has grabbed your attention. I promise that I am not being deceptive or sensationalizing the story. Therefore, let’s check it out: Jaw-dropping twist: This landowner’s patience will shock you!

Like any other story, our first question must be: who is the intended audience? Although it is true that Jesus’ story has meaning for us today, we are not the people that Jesus was primarily confronting with this parable. Jesus told this parable to confront the sins of the Jewish leaders of his day. This fact is demonstrated in a verse that immediately follows what we are considering today. There Matthew wrote, “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them” (Matthew 21:45).

Jesus told this story in a string of three parables that were calling out the Jewish religious leaders of his day. This follows immediately after the story we considered last Sunday through Pastor Pufahl’s sermon. Last Sunday, Pastor Pufahl gave us the occasion of the telling of the story. This is the Tuesday of Holy Week, the week in which our Lord died on the cross.

With this context in mind, let us consider the jaw-dropping twist of the landowner’s patience in Jesus’ story. I am sure that this patience is certainly shocking. As we meditate upon this story, we will first hear a synopsis. Then, we can identify the major characters. Finally, we will explore the meaning of this story.

Here is the story that Jesus told. There was a man who owned a vineyard. This man put tremendous care into his vineyard. He built a fence around it, dug a wine press, and built a watchtower. Then, the landowner rented his vineyard out to some tenant farmers. When it was harvesting time, the landowner sent some of his servants out to collect his share of the crop.

Thus far, this story is clear, straightforward, and normal. Yet, it is about to take a very strange turn. One might even call it jaw-dropping. This landowner’s actions are certainly shocking.

The tenant farmers decided that they will not give the landowner what he is due. Instead, they commit some horrible and grievous crimes. They seized the servants of the farmer. Then, they proceeded to beat one, kill another, and stone a third.

As horrible as those actions were, this is where Jesus' story gets even more shocking. The landowner did not press charges or pursue punishing these tenant farmers, who were now guilty of many crimes. Instead, he sent more of his servants to them. Then, these tenant farmers turned around and did the same thing to the next group of servants.

With the death toll rising, the landowner now made a decision that might seem downright ridiculous. Again, he did not pursue the punishment of these tenant farmers. Instead, he decided to send his son to them. In doing so, he spoke for the first time in this story. He said, "They will respect my son."

Yet, they did not respect his son. In thinking that they would gain the son's inheritance, the tenant farmers killed the landowner's son. That is the end of this story. Kind of a grim ending to the story, right?

Let's identify the characters of this story that Jesus told. The landowner is God. The tenant farmers are the religious leaders of Israel. They were to work the vineyard, which is Israel. The servants, who were sent, are the Old Testament era prophets. The son, who was rejected and killed, is Jesus.

As I already mentioned, through this parable Jesus was calling out the sins of the Jewish religious leaders. God had called them to watch over his people and to bear his fruit. Yet, they wanted to keep it for themselves. They refused to listen to God's servant. They refused to listen to God's Son.

In Jesus' explanation of this parable, he pointed out the truth about the Son who was rejected. He does this by quoting Psalm 118. There it is written, "²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. ²³This is from the LORD. It is marvelous in our eyes." Here, Jesus emphatically pointed out the most wonderful truth in all of this. The son, who was rejected, by the farmers, the Son of God, who was rejected by the religious leaders of Israel, has become the cornerstone. He is the rock of salvation. This is from the Lord, and it is marvelous! Even more shocking than the actions of those in the story, is the victory of the rejected Son!

As we consider this story, a major theme is patience. The patience of this landowner was shocking. When the landowner sent his servants the first time and they were beaten, killed, and stoned, we would have expected him to come down upon them with a harsh punishment. Yet, he was shockingly patient with them. He then sent servants again to the same demise. He was still shockingly patient with them after that. He then decided to send his son to them. At this point, we might wonder how patient he could possibly be. As this landowner represents God, this causes us to think about the jaw-dropping patience of God.

God's patience is so shocking and so outside of what we can really understand. That is what makes this story seem so strange. A potential illustration would be the patience a parent has for his children. Kids can do some frustrating things. They can throw fits, fight with each other, and get into major trouble when they are older. Yet, a good parent is patient with his children. Even the best of parents are not this patient though. Many parents can lose their cool over seemingly trivial things because their patience has worn thin. Now, this patience is what a parent shows their children. To have such patience that leads to sending a Son for the rebellious people is even more unfathomable. Yet, this is the jaw-dropping patience of God.

Brothers and sisters, our God is very patient. You know that. We are examples of his patience. I look at all the times I have sinned, I look at the same sins that I have repeated, and I am shocked at God's patience with me. I am sure you too can relate. Hasn't God been patient with you?

Knowing God's patience, why do we then test his patience? If we move forward and sin even though we know it is wrong, we are testing God's patience. This is what God's Word says, "What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2 EHV). Continuing in sin is not fitting with the faith God has given to us. Moving forward with intentional sin is testing the patience of an abundantly patient God.

In explaining the story that we read today, Jesus explained that there is an end to God's patience for those who reject His Son. Persistent sin can be a sign of a rejection of God's Son. Listen to the condemnation that Jesus spoke to the religious leaders of Israel, "That is why I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruit. Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls" (Matthew 21:43-44). Unbelief and impenitent sin lead to destruction.

God is patient, yet have you tested his patience? Is there a sin onto which you have held, a pet sin? You take the mindset of 'one day I will stop doing this.' Perhaps, it is watching pornography online. Maybe, it is binge drinking on the weekends. Or, you are consistently discontent with the gifts God has given you. Yes, God is patient. He is amazingly patient. He is shockingly patient. Do not use his grace as a license to sin. Do not abuse the patience of God. If you do, you will hear the same condemnation as the Jewish religious leaders following this story.

"If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13 EHV). In this verse, the Apostle Paul speaks about the faithfulness of God. God has remained faithful to his promises. He promised to send his Son to save us on the cross. He promised to strengthen us by the Holy Spirit through the Word and sacraments. He promised to hold you close to

him. The shockingly patient God is also abundantly faithful. He has held true to his promises, and he will continue to do so. Therefore, he will continue to be our jaw-dropping-ly patient Savior.

Recognizing that God is indeed patient with us, let us not test his patience. Instead, let us give him thanks for his wonderful grace. As those who are forgiven of all our sins, even the persistent ones, let us thank our God by ceasing such sin. Protect your eyes from the temptations of the screen. Protect your body from the temptations of overindulgence. Protect your heart from the covetousness and discontentment of materialism. Do this to thank our abundantly patient God who showed us ultimate patience by sending His Son to live in our place and die for our sins. In this life, receive the strength to do so from His means of grace. Go to His powerful Word. Come to the altar to receive Jesus' body and blood.

Jaw-dropping twist: This landowner's patience will shock you! was not a clickbait title. There is nothing untrue to this. God's patience is shocking. He has shown us this patience repeatedly. Let us not abuse his patience. Instead, let us live lives that thank God for his faithfulness. We can do this empowered by his Spirit and grace. Amen.