



Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard to the temple leaders, and like many parables he intends to disrupt our expectation of how God acts. The wealthy landowner in the time of Jesus lets out his vineyard to tenants who are expected to give their share of the crop as rent. Instead, when harvest comes the tenants beat the servants of the landowner, and then, on a third attempt, kill the landowner's own son. We may want to be quick to say the temple leaders are correct—the tenants must be replaced or that the son, who is heir, is a Christ figure, sacrificed. Another possibility, consistent with Matthew's parables of Jesus, is that leaders are responsible to the faithful care of Israel—and *all* of God's people. The parable is not about kicking out the tenants, but about caring for the abundance of the vineyard *and* the people *and* the leaders. Jesus is speaking with authority about God's desire to care for all the people, even the "wicked tenants" and the absentee landlord. Leaders, Jesus reminds the people listening, must care for the people entrusted to them with justice and mercy in the fruitful vineyard

Our Gospel of Good News is the same Gospel that Francis, born in 1182, in Assisi, over 100 miles from Rome, heard as a child. He heard stories of vineyards, the Beatitudes & stories of Mary and baby Jesus. He heard stories of healing, suffering, death, resurrection, and stories about God's care of the birds of the air. Perhaps we don't think of this rich young man, son of a wealthy cloth merchant, going to church, but he did. War broke out between Perugia and Assisi and Francis joined the war at the age of 20. Wearing new armor and rich clothes, he was not killed, but became a prisoner and was held for ransom for a year. Some stories say he had visions while he was being held captive. When he returned home, he was weak and ill. His health returned while with his family, but war changed him. Much to his father's disappointment, Francis continued to give his father's money to the poor. On the street one day, he encountered a leper. Instead of moving away, he embraced the man as though Christ—and experienced a new joy. His carefree life of wealth, privilege and fancy clothes no longer held his attention. He escaped to pray at many of the small churches around the busy city of Assisi.

Hearing a voice command him to "build God's church" while looking at a local church in ruin, Francis took a bolt of cloth and sold it planning to repair the church. His father brought him before the local Bishop, demanding that Francis return the money. Francis not only gave back the money, but stripping off his clothes before the Bishop in the cathedral, declared God was his only Father.

Stories abound about Francis' kindness, his healings and his delight in God's creation. While he practiced his preaching, as the story is told, the birds and the animals gathered around to listen. He could speak to a wolf and praised brother Wind and Air, sister Water and sister Mother Earth. Children learned the Christmas story when he asked local woodworkers to carve nativity sets so the children could imagine the story.

When Francis accepted followers, they embraced poverty and simplicity, caring for the marginalized and the sick. Francis loved not only the vineyard, but all the ground he walked upon because he and all that is created is beloved of God.

