

Lucia Lloyd's sermon
Proper 22, Year A
Matthew 21:33-43

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Today's program is sponsored by Sylvia Pencak in memory of her friend Tom Sep.

He writes, "After more than 40 years teaching mindfulness and compassion to thousands on the spiritual path, the most important message I can offer is this: You don't have to wait to be free. You don't need to postpone being happy.

"All too often the beautiful spiritual practices of mindfulness and compassion become entwined with a vision of self-discipline and duty. We see them as taking us through a long road of obstacles that leads eventually to distant benefits. Yes, there is hard work of the heart and there are demanding cycles in our lives. Yet wherever you are on your journey, there is another wonderful truth called "Living the Fruit" or "Starting with the Result" The fruits of well-being and the experience of joy, freedom, and love are available now, whatever your circumstance! When Nelson Mandela walked out of Robben Island prison after 27 years of incarceration, he did so with such dignity, magnanimity, and forgiveness that his spirit transformed South Africa and inspired the world. Like Mandela, you can be free and dignified wherever you find yourself. However difficult your circumstances, however uncertain the times, remember, freedom is not reserved for exceptional people. No one can imprison your spirit." The author is Jack Kornfield, in his book, *No Time Like the Present: Finding Freedom, Love, and Joy Right Where You Are*.

What a stark contrast it is with the behavior of the tenants in today's gospel passage. The landowner plants a vineyard and provides everything it needs, including a hedge around it, a winepress in it, and a tower for it. He trusts the tenants while he is away in another country. When the owner sends his servants to get his fruit at harvest time, the tenants turn to hostility and violence, beating one, killing one, stoning one. And even after they have been so horrible, the landowner is patient, sending more servants. The tenants do the same to them. Then the landowner sends his own son, saying "They will respect my son." By this time, the tenants are so consumed with their hostile delusions that they think that they will get the son's inheritance by killing him.

Well, that's one way to relate to God. To think we'll get an inheritance from God by violence and hostility. Or we could begin "living the fruit" and realizing that God has already provided all the joy, freedom, and love we need, and more.

Kornfield goes on to say, “When your boss calls and you feel fear or anxiety, when someone in your family is in conflict or duress, when you feel overwhelmed by the growing problems of the world, you have choices. You can be bound and constricted or you can use this difficulty to open and discover how to respond wisely in this unfolding journey.”

There are a variety of ways to do this. Kornfield describes even a child doing it: “When I was 8 years old, on an especially bitter windy winter day, my brothers and I dressed in jackets and scarves and gloves and went out to play in the snow. I was skinny as a rail and shivering with cold. My twin brother Irv, stronger, wilder, and more robust, looked at me, contracted and fearful, and laughed. Then he began to remove layers of clothing, first the gloves, his coat, then a sweater, his shirt, undershirt, all the while laughing. He danced and paraded around half-naked in the snow, the icy wind whipping around us. We were all wide-eyed, laughing hysterically.

“In that moment, my brother taught me about choosing freedom, manifesting a spirit that to this day I still remember. Whether we’re in a wildly blowing snowstorm or feeling the cold wind of loss, blame, or of our collective insecurity, we want to be free. We want to be released from fear and worry, not confined by judgments. We want to allow ourselves to trust, love, express ourselves, and be happy.”

We can act like the tenants if we want to, with fear and hostility, rejecting God, rejecting our neighbors. We can think that living in constant conflict is the only way to get our needs met. It leads inevitably to death.

God gives us this stark parable as an opportunity to realize that this is not what we want. We can recognize that this is not our only option for responding to God. God who provides the magnificence of creation, God who provides prophets to guide us, God who provides a Son willing to suffer our rejection and violence. God who provides infinite love. We can realize that we have it already, and respond with love, and freedom, and joy, and gratitude.