

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Fifth Sunday in Lent  
March 25, 2007  
Luke 20:9-20

## *“Demolition and Construction”*

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

Just the other day I was driving down 76th Street and saw the telltale signs of the season. Orange barrels along the road. There is that old joke that there are just two seasons--winter and road construction. Construction season is upon us once again. Yet it is often the case before construction something has to be torn down. This suggests the theme for this morning based on the Gospel lesson--Demolition and Construction. Demolition of course means to tear down--sometimes gradually, sometimes spectacularly and suddenly. Construction is the opposite--to build up. Both of these thoughts are present in the text for today and we pray that the Lord would guide us as we hear and heed His holy Word.

### I. The Parable

The Gospel for this morning is another parable spoken by Jesus. It was part of the great discussions during Holy Week which Jesus had with the ruling authorities of the Jewish people. It followed the cleansing of the Temple when Jesus threw out the merchants and money changers. While some of Jesus' parables are difficult to understand--this parable is easily understandable. So in the gospel Jesus speaks, "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long time." (V.9) And it is these tenant farmers who cause the difficulty. For every time the landowner sends his servants to collect the rent the tenants beat, wound and utterly reject the servants. And this continued to occur. Now the words of Jesus were not meant to hide anything. In fact, the religious leaders of his day listening would have known exactly what Jesus was referring to. He was giving a summary of Old Testament history and the treatment that the prophets received as they brought the message of God to the people and to the leaders to repent and turn to the true ways of God.

At this point in the parable Jesus turns prophetic. Listen to what he has to say, "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' 15 And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him." Indeed they would kill the Son. For in just a few days from when Jesus spoke these words the plotting and conspiracy of the religious leaders would come to fruition. The Son of God would be arrested and falsely accused and condemned to death. And He would carry His cross from the city and be crucified. For would not the high priest himself say, "It is necessary that one man die for the people." So would be fulfilled the words of this parable. It is as we sang in the sermon hymn: "They rise and needs will have my dear Lord made away. A murderer they save, the prince of life they slay." These words are most

appropriate in this Lenten season as we approach in just one week the beginning of Holy Week and the remembrance of the passion of our Lord.

## II. Demolition and Judgment

But how very applicable this parable is for our own day as well. Indeed this could be the parable for the church today. We need to be reminded that the vineyard is God's own people. It is His church which is planted in the world. The world may be attacking the church but there are forces within the church that are doing just as good a job as they reject the message of the servants of the landowner. As Jesus' spoke these words to the leaders of the church so they are also particularly applicable to leaders in the church today. And the greatest attack still being made in the church is on Jesus Himself. How tragic that so many theologians and preachers no longer fully confess the truths about Jesus but present a watered-down, wishy-washy message about a good man and a good example but not as the Savior. Or they present a message of self esteem and self interest that has very little to do with the Scriptural understanding of sin and grace. (Joel Osteen) Others today take offense at the Scriptural definition of God, they do not wish to confess Him as Father, Lord, and King and have taken upon themselves the task of rewriting the hymns, the prayers and even the Scriptures themselves to be "politically correct". (The ELCA hymnal) As in many past generations, people are hard at work in tearing down the walls, and trampling the grapes. They may think that the grass is greener outside of the vineyard of the Lord only to discover when they get outside that there are only weeds and thorns. The work of demolition goes on.

And the response of the Lord to the demolition is judgment. Indeed when Jesus asks in the text what will the landowner do to those tenants when he comes, he says, "He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Fierce and final will be the judgment of God against those who were not faithful stewards of the vineyard. Fierce indeed was the judgment of God against Jerusalem and those who had rejected His Son. With great sorrow Jesus would say, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you stone the prophets and kill those sent to you, how often would I have gathered you like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing but you would not. Now is your house left unto you desolate." Where is the hand on the clock of God's judgment today?

## III. Construction

So far, our text has been a little heavy on the law. There has not been very much good news here. But there is good news in the text. It is found in Jesus quotation from the Psalms, Psalm 118 verses 22-23. These words are often used at Easter time and they are beautiful words. They are often read as part of the service at a Christian burial as well. For in spite of the demolition which the forces of evil are engaged in, God is in the construction business. "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" The verses that follows continues with the shout of victory, "The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." The rejected stone, the reviled and

crucified Son, is now the cornerstone, the capstone--the beginning of a new building and a new creation. An old hymn makes it so clear: "Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone, Chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the church in one."

In an ancient building, the cornerstone was the most important stone to be laid. All the rest of the measurements and construction of the building were dependent upon the care with which the cornerstone was placed. What comfort it is to know that Jesus Christ is our cornerstone and that it is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth. God continues to build with us as He strengthens and empowers us by His Word and by the Sacraments. By grace we are the building blocks and living stones of the Christian Church. We are reminded of the words of St. Peter: "As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him--you also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:4-5) In Christ, we bring forth the fruits of faith in our lives. So St. Paul can rejoice in his life of faith in the epistle for this day as he puts it all in perspective: Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

### Conclusion

There will continue to be those engaged in the work of demolition. It has always been that way. But the construction goes on as well. Thanks be to God He continues to build his church until the last day when the last living stone will be put in place for all eternity. And never forget,

Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's head,  
You are her one foundation;  
In You she trusts, before You bows,  
And waits for your salvation,  
Built on this rock secure,  
Your Church shall endure  
Though all the world decay  
and all things pass away.  
O hear us, hear us, Jesus!

Amen.