

**Lord, we cannot earn your love. You lived and died and rose for us.  
All that we do is as nothing in comparison. We draw near in faith, for we would know you.  
We offer our righteousness, for we would love you.  
We enter your holiness, for we would become like you. Amen.**

**When we adopt the values that the world offers, and not the way that you offer...  
Your kingdom come; your will be done. When we ignore your truth and go our own way...**

**When we base our living on the trivial and overlook the eternal...  
May your kingdom come through our repentance, through our forgiveness and through  
our renewal. Your kingdom come; your will be done. Amen.**

1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine :  
O what a foretaste of glory divine !  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God ;  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood :  
*This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture burst on my sight ;  
angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love :

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love :

Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 548

Jesus tells a story about Israel and God using the familiar image of a vineyard. However, Jesus' version leaves his listeners feeling uncomfortable. With their certainties challenged, the religious authorities are fearful for themselves.

Matthew 21:33-46 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup> But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup> So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup> Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" <sup>41</sup> They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup> The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

*Let us pray*

**Christ is our cornerstone, on him we can depend.**

**Christ is our cornerstone, in him do we trust.**

**Christ is our cornerstone, on him all our hopes rest.**

**Christ is our cornerstone, he will never fail us.**

**Christ is our cornerstone, he is marvellous in our eyes.**

**Christ is our cornerstone, to him we offer praise and worship. Amen.**

Reflection on the Gospel: Jesus begins his parable: ‘There was a landowner who planted a vineyard’ (v.33). Some Bible commentators suggest that Matthew is simply following Mark, but the key connection that Matthew’s audience would have made is with Isaiah 5.1-7:

*Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard:*

*My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.*

*I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!*

They know the vineyard tradition. They know what Isaiah did with it. They probably feel comfortable that they know where Jesus is going with his parable. That he is, in effect, telling them of a dark event of the past, one that everyone knows about, but he is going to end by telling them, ‘but it’s all right, things are different now’. Except, Jesus doesn’t do that. Instead, the ending in which the tenants are driven out and new tenants brought in is deeply disturbing: more disturbing than Isaiah’s changed ending was in his day.

In one of Tom Wright’s books ‘Jesus and the Victory of God,’ he states ‘Israel is the vineyard, her rulers the vineyard keepers; the prophets are the messengers, Jesus is the son; Israel’s God, the creator, is himself the owner and father’. In Jesus’ retelling and refocusing of Isaiah’s parable, now is the time of crisis. God cannot be blackmailed by the supposed terms of his own covenant. Israel exists for the will of God, not vice versa. It is an urgent summons to action for the priests and Pharisees to whom Jesus is speaking. It demands openness to a renewed covenant and taking the risk of setting aside cherished ideas. Imagine the history of any developed nation retold, not as the rise of a great nation, but of national ambition, self-

righteousness and ambiguous power. Jesus says not only that nothing has changed (since Isaiah), but that it is going to get even worse. And he invites his hearers to respond. Not for the first time, they either do not hear, or they become defensive (v.46), and their compromised response comes to nothing. Take a few moments to reflect on our time here right now in this pivotal point of the pandemic. Is it a time to reevaluate what is important and vital? Have we or are we still defensive when it comes to new things and new ways? Consider the things that we have held on to in the past which we may now realise are insignificant and inconsequential.

Draw two lines on a sheet of paper, one horizontally through the centre, the other vertically, dividing the paper into four. In the top left section, write 'I am sure'. In the top right, write 'I am not sure'. In the bottom left, 'I hope'; and in the bottom right, 'I fear'. Spend time thinking about yourself and your life, and then write or draw anything that comes to mind for each section. Continue for as long as you want to, then close your eyes and simply say, 'God, please guide me.' Open your eyes and silently read through all that you have written or drawn, seeking to listen for what God is telling you. Thank God for his wisdom and love.

**We pray for those whose work is pleasing to God.**

**We remember all who seek to feed the hungry:**

**those who work for aid agency projects; those who raise money to fund projects;  
those who work for food banks, for the Trussell Trust... and all who give that others may eat. Lord, look with kindness on those who live in righteousness.**

**We pray for those who live in faith: for those who quietly keep an eye on their neighbours;  
for those who go shopping for others;  
for those who visit and those who offer assistance and support.  
Lord, look with kindness on those who live in faith.**

**We pray for those who live in faith:**

**for those who pray without a fuss, in frankness and honesty;  
for those who give generously of themselves;  
for those who quietly witness to the love of God within them.  
Lord, look with kindness on those who live in faith. Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art ;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive ;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.
- 3 Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be ;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee :  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise !

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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**May we live in faith, act in righteousness, always be loved and make Jesus, the Christ, the cornerstone of our lives. Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen



Pauline