

5-10-14 - Trinity 16 – 8.00 am Said Communion. The Rev Hugh Wickner
Readings: Isaiah 5. 1-7 Matthew 21. 33-46

‘Why doesn’t God wipe out the wicked?’

I’ve always enjoyed the books of Frederick Forsyth ever since he wrote ‘The Day of the Jackal’ which became a blockbuster film. In my spare time I enjoy reading about the thrilling exploits of his eponymous heroes like ‘The Cobra’ and ‘The Afghan.’ It’s always obvious to the reader that the dark and inhospitable places, where the hero is instructed to go alone, are fraught with hazard and much better avoided.

So when I hear today's gospel story about the servants who were sent to the vineyard but beaten up by the tenants of the vineyard, I wondered what on earth possessed the owner of the vineyard to send a second lot of servants, let alone his own son. Why didn't he go straight to the law?

Reasonable people would very quickly have realised that disposing of the servants was not a sensible way of retaining their tenancy. But a moment's consideration would have shown them that any owner who took the trouble to send two lots of servants and then his own son, was very deeply interested indeed.

It's all an allegory of course, aimed at the Jews. The religious authorities were deeply hostile to Jesus, so he told this story where the owner of the vineyard is clearly God who sent the first the prophets, then his own son to collect the harvest. And through this story Jesus the son predicts his own death at the hands of the Jewish religious authorities.

It's a story which perhaps sounds very unlikely to modern ears, and which at first sight perhaps seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with life today. But it's actually a story which has some quite disturbing undertones.

It offers a picture of a God who is deeply interested and concerned with his people, but who doesn't interfere. A God who allows his people to beat and to rape: to torture and to murder. A God who has given authority to his people, who has given his people charge of the vineyard, and who will therefore not snatch back that authority even in order to prevent war and violence.

For our God is not a god of violence. He's not a Messiah who storms in with his troops and a great show of force to sort out the evil in human life.

Our God is a God of grace. A God who showers his love on everyone. A God who opens wide his arms and welcomes every human being. A God who longs to give all his people the wonderful and amazing gifts he has waiting for them, but who refuses to force anyone into accepting his gifts.

What is our part in all this? We Christians are the tenant farmers. It's our responsibility to farm in such a way that the harvest is plentiful. We are the ones to whom the owner of the vineyard will look when he comes to collect his harvest.

So it's up to us to show our world that there's a better way than violence and the worship of money and success, and other evil. It's up to us to find a way of telling our world about our God of love and about Jesus, so that the world can actually hear what we say. And it's up to us to deepen our own relationship with God so that we can't help but display the fruits of his spirit in our own lives.

And when the owner of the vineyard comes to collect his harvest, how good it will be to hear him say "Well done you good and faithful servants " Amen

