

Tending the Vineyard—A Parable for our Capital Campaign

Matthew 20:1-16

9/24/17

I confess to you that I don't like this parable, though I need it: the guys who work an hour at day's end get paid the same amount as the ones who worked $\frac{3}{4}$ day – or all day – and the vineyard owner says to me—as I identify with the all-day laborers--“you were paid fairly. Do I not have the right to be generous?” I think sure – so why not pay me more than a normal 8-hour day's wage and grant me an amazing windfall like the one-hour workers? Why be generous only to the latecomers? I know hard work has its own rewards....but.....

And I know the parable is doing its work in me... for at many points in my life it was all I could do to show up at the last possible moment and by God's grace it was enough. It was a baby step toward a glimmering horizon....

Today I'd like to look at the vineyard in a different way, for in some ways we're all stepping into vineyards that have been in existence and have been cultivated long before we came along. Many of us align our professional energies with institutions that existed before we were born. And if not, our daily lives connect us to entities whose years of existence and functioning serve us well.

Each of us are laborers coming to vineyards that others have planted, with varieties of fruit and vines that were selected before we arrived on the scene; and part of our mission is to nurture the strength and vitality of the vines that thrive, to assess what is best for vines that need strengthening yet show promise, and which weak ones need perhaps to be tilled up as nourishment for the others.

Most of us here today came to the Christ Episcopal Church and School vineyard within the last 50-60 years and if we're working on the parish vines, we might hardly know the School vineyards exist. However, we share vines in this building and the school's portion of the vineyard extends to other fields as well.

The vine-tenders on our vestry and school leadership have proposed a new venture we've been looking at in recent months and I'd like to note why I think this new idea for enriching our parish and school vineyard is great.

First, our vineyard is intricately interwoven. We share space--buildings and classrooms-- and our finances are deeply linked. We share a deep commitment to the Christian faith, and a commitment to respect other enduring faith traditions. Five mornings every week our 102 Middle School and Lower School students plus their teachers sit right here here for morning chapel.

I've heard folks say “I'm not too crazy about putting more money into a school that I couldn't afford for my own children”--or “I can't support a private school when there are people in dire need around the world”; or “I can't support this plan when we're having to cut ministries in our own parish budget.”

I respect the challenges raised here: they are all part of our reality. We do sponsor an independent school which charges tuition, though we have a diverse student population with many receiving financial aid and scholarships. There are indeed many people hurting in desperate ways around the world and we are having to trim our parish vines and ministries for the thriving of our whole organism – all of these realities are true.

I respectfully add that in the abstract they are very important factors in asking whether or not to **form** an independent school. However these points seem to obscure the other reality: that our current school just celebrated its **50th anniversary**, has found a stable enrollment figure over the past several years with stable finances, and has a vision for strengthening its future for the decades ahead. **We are part of a vineyard that is an Episcopal parish and its mission school. We are a package deal.** Moreover, we own the whole vineyard. If we elect to let the school portion of the vineyard wither away, we still pay the mortgage on the land and the vines.

I'd much rather be nurturing the vineyard for a promising future, rather than leaving many of the vines to dry up, wondering what might have been different if we'd supported them. Moreover, our vines are so integrated that when one part withers, all of the vines suffer. Our campaign will replenish and build up both parish and school vines—from an elevator and remodeled shared classrooms and bathrooms to a new, right-sized school building

I'd like to present two snapshots of the beauty of Episcopal schools: the first from our own CES. I recently spent an hour with our Head of School and 8th graders as she talked with them about the violence we witnessed in Charlottesville, Virginia several weeks back (re. the taking down of a Confederate statue). She pointed to hate-filled expressions made, noting how tempting it can be to speak unkindly to each other and let anger get the best of us. She told these 19 students she wanted to give them tools for speaking respectfully and at times in challenging ways to each other when they heard a friend or classmate say something unkind to another. She walked them through a sheet of possible statements they could use in such situations—and I am glad to give you a copy of this sheet if any are interested. She concluded by asking them: “as a member of the CES community, is it possible that each individual could commit to the following statements in order to support the common good?”

I am a person who will speak up against bigotry.

I will not let hate have the last word.”

As I left that session I said to myself, this is transformational education and transformational faith at work. If my son were a middle school student I'd want him to be here. I may not have been able to afford the school, though I'm still so very glad it is here.

David Brooks, a New York Times columnist and political commentator on the Friday PBS NewsHour, preached a sermon at Washington National Cathedral this past February. To my complete surprise he noted having been educated an Episcopal school in his younger days in New York City. This Jewish man who now lives in Bethesda says the front lawn of the cathedral is his summer office where he takes his calls. Listen to how sitting in his Episcopal school's chapel and the cathedral have shaped who he is and how he experiences God. (video clip from his sermon presented here—available on youtube)

[February 12, 2017: Sunday Sermon by David Brooks](#)

I believe there's a vitally important place in the world for Episcopal schools. We are a tremendous part of God's glorious vineyard!! Because of our school, we engage in the enterprise of building faith a **minimum** of six days a week – in this very space.

May God continue to bless our abundant vineyard, and may we make real all of the rich fruits the Spirit invites us to cultivate. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia Simpson