

A self-righteous, know it all man entered the doctor's office. He said, "Doctor I feel terrible. Examine me and tell me what's wrong." The doctor asked, "Do you drink much alcohol? The man said "absolutely not," the doc inquired, "do you smoke tobacco" the arrogant man said "of course I don't." "Do you go to bed early?", the Physician asked. The man looked at the doctor with disdain and "Yes, I go to bed exactly 9:00 and rise at 6:00." No matter what the doctor asked, the man had abrupt and proper answers to his questions. The doctor paused, looked at the man and asked, "Well, do you have pains in your head?" "Yes," said the man. OK said the doctor that's your trouble. Your halo is on too tight.

Last week Jesus told the self-righteous religious leaders that others were entering the Kingdom of God before them because they were stiff necked, stubborn, unwilling to listen to God's messengers. Again, this week's parable is addressed to the religious leaders.

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again, he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?* Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

A friend of mine owns a blueberry orchard. Last year he gave me a tour of his property where he proudly pointed out a large section of new blueberry plants. We then walked over to another parcel of his land where he was replacing plants that were not producing good fruit.

Jesus tells the religious leaders that they are being replaced by people who will produce good fruit. They had rejected Jesus the cornerstone but why did they not accept Him?

The Lord describes their spirituality with a story of two men who went up to the temple to pray. The first man, a religious leader proudly stood in the Temple and said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people -- robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like that tax collector in the back. I pray often, I fast twice a week, I pay a tenth of all I have.

But the tax collector in the back stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, I am a sinner." Jesus concluded the story by saying, "It was the tax collector who was reconciled to God and not the religious leader."

The pride and self-righteousness of the religious leaders had blinded them. Jesus said, “You have eyes but you do not see, ears but you do not hear.” It seems that their religious acts were not making them more compassionate and kindhearted but their hearts had become hardened.

St. Paul writes, “even if you have all the spiritual gifts and faith to move mountains but you do not have love, you are nothing at all. It has been said, “if praying causes, us to feel superior to those who don’t pray, then we have missed the mark.”

The religious leaders missed the mark and God’s vineyard was taken away from them, but who did He turn His vineyard over too? Each of us are a part of God’s vineyard, called to bear good fruit.

Last week I was walking through the village of Stamford where I am covering weekend Masses. I came across nine large stones on the border of someone’s front lawn. There were nine words painted on the stones: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, goodness, gentleness, self- control. These are fruits, the qualities we are called to produce in God’s vineyard.

Jesus said, ‘I am the true vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.’ Staying connected to Jesus and bearing good fruit is our calling.

My friend who owns a blueberry orchard told me that growing productive blueberry plants doesn’t happen by accident, they need the right soil, lots of sun, suitable fertilization, proper watering. Even with all that cultivating, blueberry plants will take years before producing good fruit.

My friend produced good blueberries because he was to take the time and cultivate them. Being willing to cultivate those nine qualities on those stones takes a lot of nurturing, it doesn't happen by accident. It all begin with a desire to develop those nine virtues and enriching them through prayer, the Sacraments, Scripture reading, meditation, reaching out to others. Just as blueberry plants take years to produce good fruit, growing in God's virtue doesn't happen overnight, it takes time.

I invite you this week to take some time and reflect the words on those stones: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control, remembering that cultivating God's fruits takes a lot of nurturing and time to develop.

Let us pray: please pray after me: Lord Jesus, you are the True Vine, I am one of your branches; help me to stay connected to you for apart from you I can do nothing. Amen and Amen.