

## The challenge of the vineyard

The theme of the vineyard continues this week as we read the parable of the wicked tenants. Its dramatic conclusion teaches us something extraordinary about the call of being a Christian.

One of the things that we are so conscious of in our modern world is the notion of what constitutes success. More often than not it includes an element of financial worth or value. We see the famous and glamorous people of the showbiz world or the well paid entertainers and entrepreneurs of the sporting and financial arenas and we tend to regard them as people who have achieved a level of success by virtue of the amount of money they have made. But of course we all know that having a healthy bank account doesn't necessarily equate to a successful or happy life. As the song says: money can't buy you love...

So with that thought in our minds what should we say is the hallmark of a successful Church? Would you say that it was one which is able to attract large congregations every week into a well ordered and comfortable building, where the liturgy sparkles and the singing raises the roof? If you do, then think about Jesus and consider his life. An itinerant preacher travelling from village to village gathering together small groups of people to listen to God's word and to pray, encouraging them to care for each other through a living out of a set of distinct and God given values based on love of God and love of neighbour. What does this do for the people it attracts? Primarily it offers a hope that their lives, for all their lack of success in worldly terms, still have a value that far outweighs anything the world can offer. It offers a love that forgives, a presence that endures, and a promise that will be kept. Above all, it says that the cross you are carrying is also my cross and that as a church, our road to success is to be measured in such terms. Yes we can have and indeed should have beautiful buildings which fill us with joy and we should produce prayerful liturgies which focus our minds on God, but if none of this turns our thoughts to asking whether or not we are helping people to understand the cross and its meaning to them in their daily lives, then sadly our church will not be a successful one.

I think that this is the message that the gospel today is spelling out for us. The tenants who cared for the vineyard were simply intent on making as much out of it for themselves as they could. They had no real concern for anyone else and what is more if anyone had the audacity to try and offer them another way then sorry mate but no thanks. It's a sad indictment of our own failure to understand and the passage from Psalm 117 shows just how far from that understanding we are.

But God's love for us is not dependant on us being successful, because God has sent his Son to us notwithstanding our so called successes. He knows what we are like from the very moment that Adam and Eve sought the forbidden fruit. He knows we need his love even though time after time we throw it back at him. Yet in spite of our foolishness, it is the stone rejected that becomes the keystone. For our Church and our churches to succeed we need to build them on the keystone that is the rejected, crucified and risen Christ. Once we have grasped this truth, then our Church will be one that is built on his love and we will be able to sing the truth that *this is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see*.