

WORSHIP NOTES

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost • October 2, 2011

The Season

We are at the midpoint of our journey through the autumn portion of Ordinary Time. For three Sundays our texts have been set in the vineyard, an image for God's kingdom, and we have been invited to live faithful lives in response to God's grace and generosity. Whether we understand that vineyard to be creation, the church, the human community, or the nation and its civic/political life, we are reminded today that the vineyard belongs to God, the giver of life and all good gifts.

In Word . . .

In the Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah), the vineyard is symbol of God's people who are not acting like God's people. Our Psalm is a lament about the condition of the vine (Israel) that God planted and a prayer for deliverance. Jesus quotes the description of the vineyard from Isaiah almost exactly in the opening verses of the parable he speaks in today's Gospel. Jesus tells a story about a landowner and a renegade group of vineyard workers who decide to keep the harvest for themselves. They reject and mistreat the owner's representatives and wind up killing the owner's son in the mistaken belief that this will enable them to steal the harvest. The vineyard tenants have forgotten that they do not own the vineyard. There are some haunting words, "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," as the spiritual leaders of Israel realize that Jesus is speaking about them. The Gospel calls us to think of ourselves as gifted tenants of God's vineyard, and warns us of the consequences of neglect. The parable points to the risk when we start to think we own what we are a part of instead of being stewards of what God has given us to use. Jesus' words are a challenge to our culture of ownership, autonomy, and self-reliance; and they are words that encourage a bit of self examination. God blesses us with opportunities and then places his trust in us to be good stewards. The welfare of the vineyard has been passed on to us, we have temporarily been entrusted with its care . . . and there is still much work for us to do . . .

And Song . . .

9:00 (Traditional)

"The Church of Christ in Every Age" was written in 1969 by British hymn writer Rev. Dr. Fred Pratt Green and subtitled "The Caring Church." It calls for the church to be the agent of change and reconciliation in the struggle against injustice; speaking of the church as "servant" and "partner in Christ's sacrifice" in stanza 3 and proclaiming the mission to serve Christ and care for all in stanza 5. Green started writing hymns after he retired from full-time ministry in 1967, and he wrote more than 300 hymns before his death in 2000 (twelve are included in *ELW*). His works crossed denominational boundaries and are sung in churches around the world. "The Church of Christ in Every Age," "For the Fruit of all Creation," and "O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come" are among his best known hymns.

10:30 (Contemporary)

Our psalm is a communal song of lament found in all three cycles of the Lectionary. The verses we sing today are a description of the history of Israel, including the exile, and a prayer that God would restore the vine he planted. Our setting is by Kevin Keil, a prolific composer of instrumental and vocal music, who believes in taking the very best of our musical heritage and blending it with a contemporary style that makes the music new again. Keil has served as organist, pianist, cantor, and music director in various churches for 30 years, and since 2009 has been the director of music and liturgy at Holy Cross Catholic Church in The Colony, Texas.