

Jesus and the Vineyard

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Starting assumptions:

Why does it matter how Jesus saw the world?

Jesus is Lord, Leader and Life-way.

Jesus of Nazareth was the living Word, and so everything he said was God-Word, and everything has levels of meaning which can come alive in every time and place.

Jesus spoke a lot in metaphor and story, often describing something in the natural world to open up other kinds of insight and challenge.

Starting problems:

a) Jesus didn't use the words 'environment', 'creation', 'pollution' ... our current questions about environmental collapse are not directly answered in the Gospels.

b) The main word for 'world' in the Gospels, '*kosmos*', can mean either the natural or the human world, or both. It mostly means rebellious human society.

Discuss John 3:16 ... For God so loved 'the world'

Four things we know for sure about Jesus:

1. Jesus saw and understood the natural world

Jesus was a keen observer of both people and other living things. He often spoke about things that other people took for granted. He noticed the way that birds ate seeds beside the track, and the way that grape vines needed pruning. Jesus loved to be alone in wild places, where he felt close to his Father. I'm sure he often prayed with his eyes open!

Remember something that Jesus said about some aspect of the natural world.

*How did Jesus **know** the world and everything in it?*

John 13:3

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power,
and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

Implications ... valuing science?

... appreciating nature in our prayer time?

... growing plants and watching living things is part of following Jesus?

2. Jesus talked about stewardship, not ownership

Jesus challenged the assumptions of those who felt they were in control.

Jesus spoke into a society with even more injustice and inequality than ours, and he undermined the categories of power.

He called everyone to integrity and personal responsibility.

Read the parable of the vineyard. Discuss: if Jesus told this today, who might we see as the tenants? Who might be the slaves/messengers? What is the threat in the story for us?

Who owns land? forest? the planet?

What is our responsibility as stewards, managers of the vineyard?

Luke 20:9-16. The Parable of the Vineyard

⁹He began to tell the people this parable:

“A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. ¹⁰When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. ¹²And he sent still a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.’ ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When they heard this, they said, “Heaven forbid!”

3. Jesus confronted people with the consequences of rebelling against God

We sometimes think that the ‘Old Testament God’ was judgemental and angry, and that the Father of Jesus is warm and fuzzy. But Jesus’ words were often harsh, especially directed to those who saw themselves as doing right by God.

How do you respond to the tough challenging words of Jesus?

What happens when those given responsibility abuse it?

A story of ecological disaster is Jesus’ parable of the two houses, one on the rock and one on the sand, Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49.

Luke 6:46-49

“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say? I will show you what someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn’t shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The river crashed against it, and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction of that house was great!”

Can we protect ourselves against disaster, both physically and spiritually?

4. Jesus called people into connection, like a grape vine

The grape vine is one of Jesus’ most vivid and evocative ways of talking about love. It is a picture of connection. Jesus saw the ancient grape vines, and how they grew out and wide all from one root base. He knew the way that sap flowed through the vine in season, filling out the grapes.

John 15:1-9

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

What damages my connection to Christ?

What helps me tap in to the Spirit of Jesus?

As we see forests cut down and burned and animal populations withering, how does this touch us? How does it affect God?