

## PARTIAL CORONATION

Have we been sent? And how many works of darkness are being fashioned to keep us from living the new life into which God is leading? When works of darkness precede or surround God's sending of us, I am learning that they often disclose a lot of valuable information that can be useful in confirming whether or not God sent us. I am learning that Satan and those who serve him attempt to make anything we must endure to become more receptive to God's desire as painful and delayed, as suspect and traumatic as possible, if they cannot altogether block it. I am learning that one of Satan's hopes against our consent to being sent into newness from God is to ensure that we enter into it as diminished and unfit for service as possible – to seize us before we get there, and leave us wounded upon arrival. Because whenever it is God who sends us into something new, we are sent and equipped in our hidden persons with abundant life and light for others that will shine out of our wounds – a light that is not our own. So it makes sense that the magnitude of the struggle we face just to enter what God has sent us into, near or far, can serve as a major indication of how deeply our growing pains offend and nullify the works of the one who opposes them.

So it was with Jesus on Palm Sunday, the day He chose to arrive at God's vineyard, Jerusalem. It was the day when, even as several crowds within her recognized and celebrated Jesus as King, those who controlled her, Roman and Jew, either plotted to take Him away from her or showed indifference to His existence.

There is another side to this. Sometimes the hustle and bustle of the darkness in my life reveals how uninitiated I am in using the authority God has given me, through baptism, to clear the thorns before I plant the seed. Not so with Jesus on Palm Sunday. He was born to break the precedent of death – the precedent of rejecting God's message. Is it clear to me yet just how much prayer it must have taken Him to free those crowds enough to welcome Him as King the way they did? By the time He had arrived on Palm Sunday, the only thorns He left available to His enemy were the ones that were put on His head.

Being defeated physically is not always a mark of weakness. In the case of Jesus, it was the mark of someone who had become superior to His enemy in every respect that mattered to God. It was

the mark of someone who had left His enemy no other recourse, in any realm, than to bewitch those He had come for into giving Him over to death. And this was intentional. Prior to this, knowing that He was probably going to be crucified, God must have given Jesus the authority to use the injustice that was going to be thrust upon Him to dethrone the source of injustice against humanity. *Because* this injustice – the injustice of killing God’s Son, who came in the flesh – grieved God’s heart far more than all our sin, Jesus bound sin upon Himself so that as long as He was going to be crucified, the power of sin and death and the devil was going to be crucified along with Him. Knowing that death hath no power to raise itself, Jesus took the worst thing we could possibly do and used it to undo the power and works of the one who was behind it – past, present, and future.

If Satan had foreseen that Jesus was going to do this, he probably never would have encouraged His death. And Satan might not risk attacking any of *us* if he did not like his chances that we will perpetuate sin in response. As God’s child, I am learning that if Satan attacks me, he becomes indebted to me. And the best way to attack me is to attack Abby, and vice versa. Through the unmerited authority of the Holy Spirit given to me, I am learning to use what Satan owes me to release those under his spell – if that’s what they want – by placing the debt in God’s hands.

So long as we do not respond to evil in kind, one of our strongest weapons against injustice remains the injustice we have experienced placed in God’s hands.

The parable of the wicked tenants is at least a parable about those who no longer desire to be sent, near or far, to those God has commanded them to love. The moment the tenants refused to be sent was the moment others began being sent to them. God’s servants were sent to break the mold that kept others out of the fold. The tenants were content to remain in the vineyard and enjoy the fruits of the kingdom themselves. And some might say that the Vinedresser (the Landowner) simply made a smart business decision by leasing the vineyard to others for a fraction of what it might have cost him to remain there. But if *Abba* is the Vinedresser, if *Abba* is the Landowner, then He did not prefer to make a decision that would put distance between Him and His people. God is pursuing you and God is pursuing me no matter what it costs to be with us – even the risk of sending His own Son to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

So why did God go away from the vineyard? And why didn't someone go after Him or ask Him to stay? The tenants were content to remain in the vineyard whether or not the beautiful presence of God was there in full. They were content to receive the fruits of the kingdom even if it meant the King was far off. They wanted Jesus' inheritance to belong to them more than they wanted to belong to *Abba* and be with *Abba*. And this had nothing to do with them being Jewish. It had everything to do with them being human.

Immediately after building the vineyard, so to speak, I imagine that God put life and death before His children, like God does with me over and over again, and said: Do you want to work for me more than you want to belong to me? Do you want the benefits of being my child more than you want to be my child? Do you want what I can give you more than who I am to you? Do you see me when you look at me, or do you see what I can do for you? If anyone knows what it must feel like to be in a relationship with someone who loves your money more than they love you, God does. And if anyone knows what it feels like to be ignored because your most valuable gifts are hard to grasp, God does.

The Vinedresser went away because He had given them what they wanted at that point, and it was not Him. No one in the parable asked *Abba* to stay. None of them ran after Him. No one cried out, "*Abba*, don't go!" He would not have left unless they did not really want Him around.

My relationship with *Abba* can descend on the outside from child to tenant, from mutual love to a purely transactional relationship, one where I do not even share what I have been given with God, if I start to believe that what I own and what He has promised me are better than His gentle and irresistible presence with me.

Do I love *Abba* more than eternal life? Am I the sort of Christian who wants the vineyard more than the Vine or the Vinedresser? Indeed, it is God's good pleasure to give me the kingdom. But what will become of the vineyard if I become content to watch her grow without the full presence of God and receiving that? She will be taken away from me.

I am learning, though, that it is not *God* who tries to make me feel as though I can only have either the vineyard or the presence of God, but not both. When presented with a choice between them,

the nearby one that I can hold onto tends to glimmer to me more than the one I cannot hold. More often than not, however, I am learning that I need to practice prioritizing and putting one of them first, instead of choosing between them.

Because Satan has absolutely nothing to offer, he tries to get me to settle for only *some* of what God wants for me or for *way more* than what God wants for me, instead of prioritizing what will come first. Satan tries to cause me to take the food without the water, the healing without the medication, an inheritance without God's Son as my brother – or whatever other false dichotomy I face – as though God is not powerful enough to orchestrate both in harmony if I listen carefully.

Because Satan has nothing to offer, he attempts to get me to settle for as much “nothing” as I will accept or for more than I was intended to possess and that belongs to someone else. So if I am the kind of person who needs both food and water but does not realize how hungry and thirsty I am, then I must be prepared to experience some doubt about my need for whichever one of God's blessings would strengthen me the most first.

So God sent the Vine to the vineyard. And each of us must choose which will come first: the source of life, or life itself; the King, or the kingdom; belonging to Christ, or what belongs to Christ.

Just as the servants of God were sent to the tenants over and over again, the Holy Spirit has repeatedly placed this parable before me since my second semester of seminary. I cannot seem to get away from it, partly because the words that Jesus attributed to *Abba* will not stop beckoning to me: “*They will respect my son,*” God said.

It is one of the few, if not the only, instance I can think of where Jesus reveals God's expectation of the Pharisees surrounding their reception of Jesus into Jerusalem. Could God really send His Son and not expect the tenants to kill Him like they did the other servants? I believe God could because His expectation of them, and of us, is good news. God expects that our respect for Jesus will outlast our desire to harm Him and those who listen to Him. And maybe in the end, it will.

PRAYER

Beloved *Abba* of Jesus, your expectations of us reveal your delight – your delight in our existence, and your delight in what we cannot yet see about ourselves that you have made. Help us Lord, for we delight in so many things – so many things that cannot delight in us. Come, Holy Spirit, come and possess our highest delight. For to delight in you throughout this week, to receive grace to stand beside you in your darkest hour, to walk with you and to stay awake with you, to experience in our flesh the willingness of our spirit – all of this would be to welcome you into Jerusalem, where you taught us to pray, *“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”*