

“I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” John 15:5

# Vine & Branches

from St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, 720 N. King Street, Honolulu, HI 96817 • Phone (808) 845-2112

## Who Owns the Vineyard?

Weekly Edition  
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The parables that Jesus tells are so powerful because they talk about eternal conditions existing in the human heart, and in human society.

Today's parable of "who owns the vineyard" is no exception. Oh, we can dismiss this parable as an old story about long dead farmers and absentee landlords.

Or, we can have the courage to look deeply at ourselves as individuals and at our society.

Because the question of “who owns the vineyard” is asked every single day in our lives.

In our broader society, it's the billionaires who say that they own the vineyard — and everyone else should be grateful to be working for them.

In our church, it's often the folks with the fancy titles who claim to own the vineyard — and if you don't follow the party line, you will be in trouble. And what is the party line?

The party line too often seems to be that everybody has a little box to occupy. The priest has his or her little box and should never venture outside of it.

While they're not quite clear about what's in that little box, if they believe you're stepping outside of it, you'll be quickly admonished to get back in.

Just so, members of the vestry and the members of the congregation all have their little boxes to which they ought to be confined.

The little boxes are sometimes defined by rules, bylaws, and by tradition. But most often, the little boxes are defined simply by the personal preferences of whoever happens to be in charge at the time.

And just like today's parable, God is having none of it. Because the vineyard, as we all know in our heads, but so often forget in our hearts, belongs to God.

And God sends us reminders of that fact. And what happens to those reminders, those messengers of God, who are sent to say:

“Wait! It's not just about rules or rituals or money! It's about compassion and creating the beloved community and generous acts of kindness, especially to those who don't deserve it.”

And how are those messengers received? If they're lucky, they are ignored. Less lucky, they're the subject of gossip and character assassination.

The unluckiest are simply thrown out of the organization. These thoughts have been running through my head because as some of you may know, there has been a fair amount of pushback coming from various quarters about the role of a rector in a church like this.

Our vestry has been told that most of the things that I do around here are not the job of a rector. That has understandably led to some consternation.



The funny thing is, there really is no definition or job description found in our canons or even our tradition that gives comprehensive guidance about what a rector can, and cannot, do.

But one thing our Episcopal faith definitely says to anyone who seeks to serve as a priest, is that one must be willing to live out, in word and deed, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To me that seems to say that when one becomes a priest, just as when one becomes a baptized Christian, that person is devoting themselves completely to this Savior and His calling to create the beloved community in this world.

Sadly, when Christianity became legitimized, institutionalized, and made the official religion of the Roman Empire in the late 300s, the authentic Christianity of Jesus Christ quickly began to die on the vine.

What had been a calling of the whole person to a life of utter transformation, (for instance, soldiers couldn't be Christians because Christians don't kill, actors couldn't be Christians, because Christians don't lie) — was reduced to the mass baptism of masses of people who had very little idea about what they were getting into.

In the earliest days, the definition of being a Christian was to commit one's whole life to this new and strange gospel that presents a completely different way of living than the way that the world is comfortable with.

But with Constantine and the institutional church, what once was a call to utter transformation simply became a call to utter obedience.

Rather than the promise of entering into the larger mind of God, here and now, it became an order to stay in line, to toe the line, and when you die, perhaps you will go to the sweet bye and bye. That tension exists in the church until today. And so we narrowly define the role of everybody in their various places in the church, turning people whose whole lives are called by Christ — into segmented, Tiki Taki, look-alike, automatons.

That old way, thanks be to God, is dying. The decline in organized church membership is a direct result of this unfortunate, yet intentional decision, to walk away from the dictates of the gospel, and to embrace the way we like things to be. Orderly. In control. Neat and clean.

There is no room for the wild Spirit of God in that way of thinking. And yet, it is the wild Spirit of God who will seize the day, and who will be victorious in the end.

And so I urge all of you my friends, to bring all of who you are to this task of being transformed in Christ.

If you have a medical background, an engineering background, an accounting background, a background in pouring concrete, or a background

in putting on roofs, all of that needs to be laid at the service of Christ. And that complete offering goes for everybody here — starting with the Rector.

Who am I, if I have experience in drug and alcohol counseling, or the law or psychology, to say to someone who is in need or to this community that can benefit from those areas of expertise: “so sorry — we can't go there.”

To decline to exercise each and every skill and experience and knowledge base that we have in furthering the Kingdom of God — is an affront.

It's an affront to God, and it's an affront to our faith. What does all of this have to do with the parable of the vineyard and the tenants and the messengers of God?

Only everything! Because the tendency of the tenants, just like it is our tendency, is to insist that we are in control, and that God will receive whatever small part of us that we decide He shall receive.

The messengers of God, who are sent repeatedly to remind the tenants, insist that that notion is completely wrong.

Those messengers are sent to remind the tenants that everything in the vineyard — belongs to God.

Including them! And that if they will give all that they are to God, God will return the favor.

Ensuring that they shall have not only all that they need, not only all that they desire, but more than they could ever possibly imagine.

Perhaps one lesson in today's parable is simply this: Let's not be stingy with our notions of who God calls us to be. Let's not try to control the unbridled and mysterious power of the Holy Spirit.

Because no matter how much trust we might want to put on “our way of doing things”, no matter how comfortable the rules and rituals make us feel, they are at best — fingers pointing at the moon.

They are not the moon itself. Let us join with St Paul who faced the exact same struggles as you and I do today, and proclaim with him: “Whatever gains I had, these I ... regard as loss because of Christ. I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, ..., in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ.”

+amen

# St. E's Update!!!!

It was a wonderful celebration with nearly 30 of us saying thank you to the Saturday morning breakfast crew that has been hard at it for eight years! **The Lino family** graciously came and shared with us the beginning days of this ministry, which they started; and so many of our members and neighbors have continued — with much love and aloha!



And before the breakfast we were joined with nearly **40 junior ROTC members from Waianae** who did everything from polish silver to pack bags to clean the acolyte sacristy to mopping the hall to serving breakfast and cleaning up. Thank you so much, dear friends!

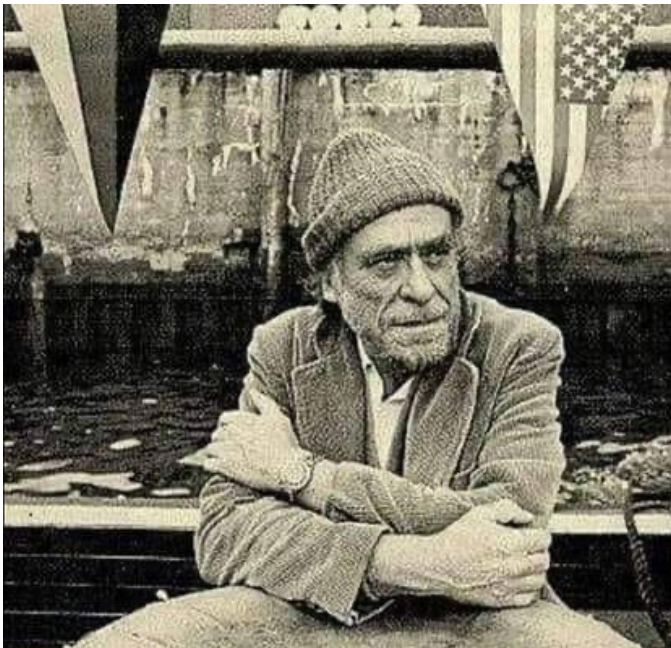
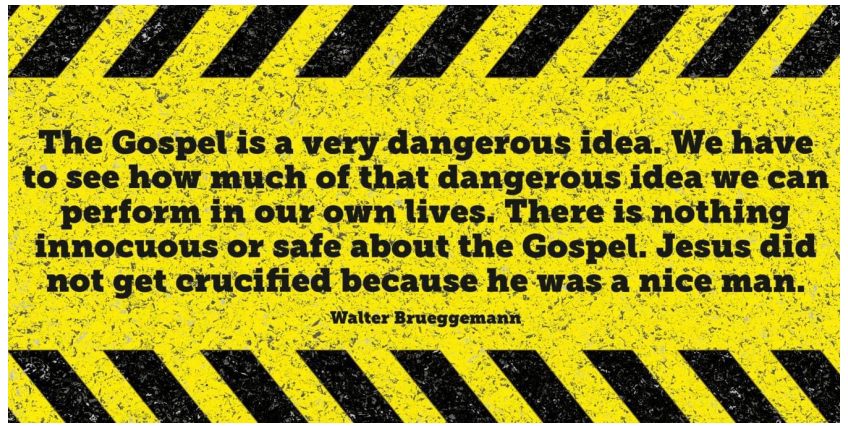


# QUOTABLE QUOTES FROM NOTABLE FOLKS



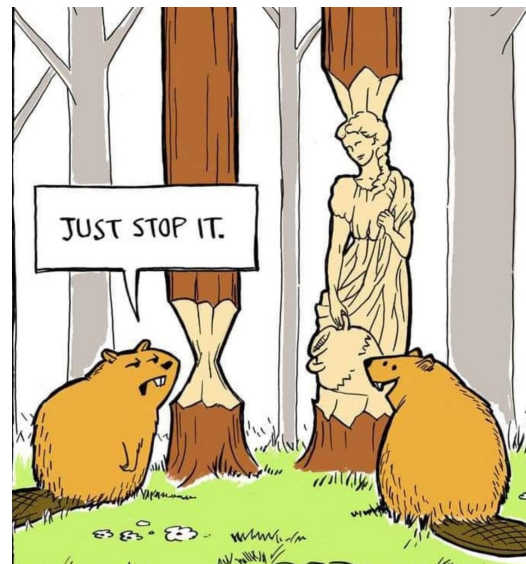
*“There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.”*

SØREN KIERKEGAARD



**“we're all going to die, all of us, what a circus! that alone should make us love each other but it doesn't. we are terrorized and flattened by trivialities, we are eaten up by nothing.”**

**- Charles Bukowski**



**GIVLIA LINK -  
THANKS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS!!!**

