

Sermon on Sunday 4 October 2026

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: Isaiah 5. 1-7 & Matthew 21. 33-end



A call to tend creation

I have a lot to talk about. After the hottest summer on record, I'm taking stock of my gardening accomplishments this year. Potatoes and plums excellent. Early courgettes and runner beans tasty and then inedible. Gooseberries made a surprise appearance, far fewer strawberries and raspberries. Apples prolific but small. Tomatoes too late. ALL flowers bloomed beautifully and then seeded quickly. Lawn diabolical. I wonder how those of you with pots, window boxes, gardens and allotments got on. Did your labour bear good fruits?

Gardens require gardening. Vineyards need tending. Today we have a parable where Jesus borrows the image of the vineyard from the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah, the vineyard stands for the Jewish people and their world. All that they are, and have, is from and of God, but greed, self-indulgence and injustice lead them to abuse the vineyard; the people and the land suffer. God's judgement is enacted, but there is hope; God's people will be renewed.

In Jesus' parable, the vineyard is again the Jewish people; the landowner is God. The landowner leases the vineyard to tenants but, when the harvest time comes, they refuse to give over his share. He sends messengers whom they beat, stone and kill. Finally, he sends his son thinking the tenants will respect him, they calculate that they can kill him, too. The parable is aimed at the Jewish leaders who are mismanaging the gift of God's Word and misguiding people – the leaders will ignore God's prophets and not recognise Jesus as Messiah and Jesus will be put to death. There will be a new order and renewal and at the centre will be obedience to Jesus as Lord. Yet, there's a lot more to talk about.

We note the landowner is very attentive, committed and thoughtful; he prepares and plants the vineyard, builds a protective wall against animals and thieves, digs a wine press and builds a watchtower. It's an amazing biblical image of God our Creator! It speaks of a world created for God's people with everything we need, including the Gift of God's Word, so that we will have the life God intended.

Just like the Landlord, God is generous in his provision. The landlord entrusts and trusts the tenants with the vineyard, God extends to us an invitation to care for the world – to tend it as God tended it; to share it by acknowledging that all the produce and its gifts come from God to build up the kingdom of God – the life that God intended for all his creation. The tenants do the opposite; they kill those who speak the truth and hoard the fruit for themselves. What do we think is happening in our world today?

Well, we see huge challenges: famines and droughts, pollution, climates shifting and extreme weather; rising sea level and seas warming; habitats shifting and wildlife struggling; peoples in crisis and on the move while nations compete for resources. Some of the news just takes my breath away.

- The UK wastes 40% of its food and drink, which creates greenhouse gases whilst many have little food to eat.
- Only 15% of English river stretches are at a good healthy standard; all contain toxic chemicals.
- The UK's bio-diversity index is going down and down.
- This year, 49 residents of a Lancashire neighbourhood were given blood tests and 70% had high levels of a forever chemical in their blood. They live next to the factory that used to make non-stick pans and are at increased risk of serious disease. Elevated levels are in the soil. Local allotments are closed as they are contaminated land.
- Every week, someone is murdered in the world for protecting their land and environment, e.g. for stopping whole forests being destroyed.
- Yet we can measure recent record levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide; they correlate to the changing global weather patterns and that means more droughts, forest fires and floods.

Now, we can sit and argue about why climate change is happening, shrug our shoulders and question what we can do; keep the produce for ourselves and rebel, blame God for not intervening, or... respond in faith.

Responding in faith starts with being honest before God and recognising how our societal, and individual, sins affect the natural world. Humans do pollute the world, we exploit resources to their limit, we choose possession over

sustainability, we exhaust water supplies and ruin habitats. We look to the short term for the most profit for those who have, whilst others try to survive, or their animals die, children die or communities cease to be. We are a part of this.

But **there is hope**. God is with us. Our biblical material is full of references to God as a committed gardener who reaches out to his people. God yearns for the fruitfulness of creation: it matters to God that his hopes for humanity have not yet come to fruition. God created us in his image to be stewards of creation. He entrusts us to work for him and with him, to care for animals and peoples, to use the gifts of creation as God intended for the benefit of all.

We have been celebrating the church's 'Season of Creation' and today is Creation Sunday. St Mary's has had the Pet Service and The Photography Exhibition 'Celebrating Nature'. St Andrew's has marked this with the Emergency Briefing film, a Coffee Morning and the Taizé Service of Gratitude, Lament and Hope. At the heart of all this is God's desire to enjoy a thriving relationship with his people - with us. Caring for our world is part of being in this relationship with God.

So, how can we put our faith into action: individually and collectively, how to make a difference? We can ask God through prayer, we can discuss with one another, we can work with all those of good will to: care for nature, to take action to mitigate the effects of the climate changing, to partner the poorest peoples of the world, to work with the church locally and globally.

We believe that God created human beings with intelligence, creativity, a sense of moral responsibility and innate spirituality. We believe he wants to work with us for the benefit of all and to glorify his name. We are called to the task as a way of responding to his love and as a way of showing love to others.

Let us work for the Lord in his vineyard, let us work with him to tend his creation in whatever way we can.

References:

Food Waste

<https://www.nebriefing.org> and

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7552/CBP-7552.pdf>

Rivers

<https://www.theriverstrust.org>

Bio-diversity

<https://www.nebriefing.org> and <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk>

Forever chemical story

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjly4rv0q3l0o>

Murder of environmental campaigners

<https://www.globalwitness.org>

Carbon Dioxide

<https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>