

**Prayers and sermon from the morning service at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 8 October 2017 - Kerry Enright, minister.**

Eternal God, you are the power behind all things, behind the energy of the storm, behind the heat of a million suns. Eternal God, you are the power behind all minds: behind the ability to think and reason, behind all understanding of the truth. Eternal God, you are the power behind the cross of Christ: behind the weakness, the torture and the death, behind unconquerable love. All of creation bears your mark. God, creator, redeemer, spirit, we praise you.

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer, we confess that we have tried to hide from you for we have done wrong, in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have lived for ourselves, and apart from you. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ was raised for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. E te whanau in Christ we are forgiven. All are God's beloved people.

**"The parable of the hostile takeover", a sermon based on Matthew 21:33-46 and preached by Kerry Enright.**

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It's very clear where the boundaries are because our property is flat and the banks are clear. So we pruned bushes on our side. We tore down vines. We built gardens, mowed lawns and removed and planted trees. We were told it had been like that for over thirty years. We knew who owned what and we felt free to do what we liked with what we owned.

Then a question was raised about a big tree on one corner. Who did it belong to? So we got a surveyor.

There was a surprise. On one side our property was more than a metre smaller than we thought, because part of the flat land belonged the neighbour – that part where we had put a clothes line and planted a garden and cut back bushes. Over the back we acquired nearly two metres more, so much so that when the surveyor was standing on our property, the neighbour called out to him ... hey, what are you doing on my land, and the surveyor had to say, I am terribly sorry, sir, it is not your land.

People had lived on the land for decades, not knowing what they owned and didn't own.

Which leads us to the parable. A landowner had a vineyard. He planted it. He put a fence around it. He dug a wine press in it. He built a watchtower. All this. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. The tenants worked the land. They tended the vines. They harvested the grapes. And the landowner sent people to collect the harvest. But the tenants terrorised the landlord's people. So the landlord sent his own son, but they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The parable of the hostile takeover.

Why did the tenants treat the vineyard as theirs? What led them to imagine they were in charge and that the whole harvest belonged to them? And why did they so violently resist the owner's approaches?

Was it that they became so focused on the daily tasks, all that vineyards involve, and their focus narrowed, and they became consumed by themselves, and after all the owner was not there, so they imagined they were in control?

Was it that they worked so hard for so long, that they imagined they had earned this vineyard? What had the absent landowner done?

Was it that this was the way they thought was right, that they had learned this way, they had done this before, and it worked, and they just kept doing it?

The parable ends with the prediction of judgement - the property will be taken away from the tenants, given to people who produce the fruit of the kingdom.

It is a disturbing thing to have taken away what we think belongs to us.

My great grand-parents learned that the hard way. Having emigrated from Ireland in 1864, they were allocated land near Waiuku. For four years they worked the land. They were hard workers. Then the authorities realised they had given them the wrong land and they had to move off the land and start all over again. It broke my great grand-father. He died as a relatively young man.

It can be hard learning we do not own what we thought we owned, that we aren't in charge as much as we thought we were. It disrupts us, overturns what we had been doing, what we had got used to.

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It happens to churches, to faith. God loved the church into being. "I sent people to show the way. I sent my son. I send the spirit to fill and guide you. I led you and encouraged you. I gathered you around the table. I fed you and sent you out into the world. But what was mine, you started taking as your own, as if you make the rules, as if there is no owner, and you made rules that excluded people I loved. I will give it to someone who produces the fruit of the kingdom."

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It happens to creation. God says: "I loved creation into being, seasons and streams, flowers and butterflies, food and water. I sent prophets and poets, teachers and guides so you knew how to care for it, to love it as I do. But you acted as if it belonged to you. You

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In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Why did the tenants treat the vineyard as theirs? What led them to imagine they were in charge and that the whole harvest belonged to them? And why did they so violently resist the owner's approaches?

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## **KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN**

***growing in courage to live the Jesus way***



**Knox Church**

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**Prayers and sermon from the morning service at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 8 October 2017 - Kerry Enright, minister.**

Eternal God, you are the power behind all things, behind the energy of the storm, behind the heat of a million suns. Eternal God, you are the power behind all minds: behind the ability to think and reason, behind all understanding of the truth. Eternal God, you are the power behind the cross of Christ: behind the weakness, the torture and the death, behind unconquerable love. All of creation bears your mark. God, creator, redeemer, spirit, we praise you.

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer, we confess that we have tried to hide from you for we have done wrong, in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have lived for ourselves, and apart from you. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ was raised for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. E te whanau in Christ we are forgiven. All are God's beloved people.

**"The parable of the hostile takeover", a sermon based on Matthew 21:33-46 and preached by Kerry Enright.**

Immediately adjacent to our property are three properties: above us, up a small bank, one neighbour. A hedge runs along the boundary. On the down side, a steep higher bank with bushes running along the boundary. Over the back a higher bank, which the neighbour has nicely landscaped.

It's very clear where the boundaries are because our property is flat and the banks are clear. So we pruned bushes on our side. We tore down vines. We built gardens, mowed lawns and removed and planted trees. We were told it had been like that for over thirty years. We knew who owned what and we felt free to do what we liked with what we owned.

Then a question was raised about a big tree on one corner. Who did it belong to? So we got a surveyor.

There was a surprise. On one side our property was more than a metre smaller than we thought, because part of the flat land belonged the neighbour – that part where we had put a clothes line and planted a garden and cut back bushes. Over the back we acquired nearly two metres more, so much so that when the surveyor was standing on our property, the neighbour called out to him ... hey, what are you doing on my land, and the surveyor had to say, I am terribly sorry, sir, it is not your land.

People had lived on the land for decades, not knowing what they owned and didn't own.

Which leads us to the parable. A landowner had a vineyard. He planted it. He put a fence around it. He dug a wine press in it. He built a watchtower. All this. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. The tenants worked the land. They tended the vines. They harvested the grapes. And the landowner sent people to collect the harvest. But the tenants terrorised the landlord's people. So the landlord sent his own son, but they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The parable of the hostile takeover.

Why did the tenants treat the vineyard as theirs? What led them to imagine they were in charge and that the whole harvest belonged to them? And why did they so violently resist the owner's approaches?

Was it that they became so focused on the daily tasks, all that vineyards involve, and their focus narrowed, and they became consumed by themselves, and after all the owner was not there, so they imagined they were in control?

Was it that they worked so hard for so long, that they imagined they had earned this vineyard? What had the absent landowner done?

Was it that this was the way they thought was right, that they had learned this way, they had done this before, and it worked, and they just kept doing it?

The parable ends with the prediction of judgement - the property will be taken away from the tenants, given to people who produce the fruit of the kingdom.

It is a disturbing thing to have taken away what we think belongs to us.

My great grand-parents learned that the hard way. Having emigrated from Ireland in 1864, they were allocated land near Waiuku. For four years they worked the land. They were hard workers. Then the authorities realised they had given them the wrong land and they had to move off the land and start all over again. It broke my great grand-father. He died as a relatively young man.

It can be hard learning we do not own what we thought we owned, that we aren't in charge as much as we thought we were. It disrupts us, overturns what we had been doing, what we had got used to.

It's fairly obvious the parable is about God sending messengers: prophets and poets, wise ones and guides, to receive what belongs to God, to receive the harvest, and the end of all the work, to receive creation as God planned it to be. The rule or reign or kingdom or vineyard of God. But the people didn't want to hand over control, to give it up. So God sent Jesus, and they still didn't want to hand it over, so they seized him and threw him out and killed him. They took what belonged to God as if they owned it.

It happens to churches, to faith. God loved the church into being. "I sent people to show the way. I sent my son. I send the spirit to fill and guide you. I led you and encouraged you. I gathered you around the table. I fed you and sent you out into the world. But what was mine, you started taking as your own, as if you make the rules, as if there is no owner, and you made rules that excluded people I loved. I will give it to someone who produces the fruit of the kingdom."

One of my favourite preachers is the late Fred Craddock.

Oak Ridge Tennessee was an overnight boomtown, and people came from all over for temporary work. They brought hard hats, families and what the Americans call trailers. It was where Fred Craddock served his first church, a white frame building 112 years old. The church had beautifully decorated chimneys, kerosene lamps, and every pew was hand hewn from a giant poplar tree.

After worship one Sunday morning Fred asked the leaders to stay saying, "Now we need to launch a calling campaign in all those trailer parks." "I don't think they'll fit in here," one member said. "They're just here temporarily, just construction people." "Well, we ought to invite them, make them feel at home," Fred said. They argued about it until... one of them said, "I move that in order to be a member of this church, you must own property in this county." Someone else said, "I second that." It passed. Fred voted against it, but they reminded him that he was just a kid preacher and didn't have a vote.

When Fred moved back to the same area years later, he took his wife to see the little church, because he had told her that painful story. There, back among the pines, was that same building shining white. It was different. The parking area was full - motorcycles and trucks and cars packed in there. And out front a great big sign: *Barbecue, all you can eat*. It's a restaurant, so they went inside. The pews were against a wall, the organ pushed over into the corner. Fred said to Nettie, "It's a good thing this is not still a church, otherwise these people couldn't be in here."

Why did the leaders imagine the church was for them and people like them? Why did they act as if they owned it?

It happens to creation. God says: "I loved creation into being, seasons and streams, flowers and butterflies, food and water. I sent prophets and poets, teachers and guides so you knew how to care for it, to love it as I do. But you acted as if it belonged to you. You

claimed it as your own, and you forgot to whom you were accountable. And it is being taken away from you, wetland by wetland, river by river, ocean by ocean, species by species.”

It happens in our lives.

“I created you in my image”, says God. “I breathed my spirit into your being. I put you in relationship with me, with the earth, with people. I made a covenant with you. I gave you a heart for love, a big heart for as many people as I loved. And as you grew, you began to imagine it was your life, that you owned it, that it belonged to you, and you made decisions without thinking of me or my people.”

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