

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 4, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Let us pray: "O beloved St. Francis, You who lived in perfect humility and joy, reflecting God's love in all creation, we come before you, seeking your intercession. Guide us on the path of peace, simplicity, and service to others, as you once walked in the light of Christ's grace. Together with you, we pray. Amen.

Throughout the worldwide church today, many will commemorate the life of the 12th century monk named St. Francis of Assisi. He was renowned for being an effective mediator of peace, even crossing enemy lines in Egypt during the Fifth Crusade in 1217. He abandoned his wealthy upbringing to live in absolute simplicity, refusing money and possessions to fully imitate Jesus. He authored the *Canticle of the Sun*, transforming his love for the natural world—calling elements "brother" and "sister." Therefore, it is our church tradition that on this Sunday, we include the Blessing of the Animals, our pets who are integral to our lives. Along with the Blessing of the Animals, we pray for what the Book of Common Prayer calls, "this fragile earth, our island home."

From recent events around the globe, and close to home, with our fires, drought, floods, and famines, we are reminded that we live totally interconnected with nature, and if we don't care for our ecological system, there will be consequences.

If you recall, the last 2 weeks in our Gospel, Jesus uses parables involving vineyards. Our guest speaker two weeks ago, Deacon J.D., spoke about the generosity of the landowner giving the laborers the same amount of pay whether they worked a full day or an hour. Last week, I spoke about the vineyard owner who had two sons. One refused to go out into the field to work, but had a repentant heart and went, while the other son used obedient words but had no action.

Today, our Gospel once again takes place in a vineyard. There's no avoiding it, this gospel is a dark and violent story that is both tragic and humorous. We observe the stubbornness in the tenants as a stubbornness in ourselves. The landowner sends messenger *after* messenger to the tenants, and each time, they are thoroughly rejected, beaten, stoned, and killed. The tenants are us. We are all living on an earth that we do not own; we are all wary of help that appears to come from outside; we all want to hoard what was never ours in the first place.

A little side note. Jesus is speaking to the pharisees and chief priests who are equally as learned as he is in rabbinic history and law. In this parable, the pharisees and the chief priests are brought back to the prophet Isaiah, who speaks about the vineyard as representation of "the people of Israel, God's people." By mistreating the vineyard, Jesus is exposing their exploitation and mistreatment of

God's people and God's temple. Jesus is warning them that if they don't repent, retribution will happen.

Through this story, Jesus implies that the pharisees and chief priests are like the wicked tenants. Because of their arrogance, they acted like they were the owners of the vineyard, not stewards of the vineyard, or stewards of God's people. Even when God had sent early warnings through multiple prophets, John the Baptist and even Jesus himself, the pharisee' and chief priests would not acknowledge their arrogance and repent.

I know that "The Parable of the Wicked Tenants," isn't straightforwardly about climate change or the environment. In 2026 though, at the heart of this parable is a distinction that I think speaks very pointedly to our current environmental crisis. What the tenants in the story neglected to understand — or very deliberately choose to ignore, was that the vineyard didn't belong to them. Somewhere along the way, the tenants have forgotten their place. In essence, they have forgotten that they are not the owners. They forgot that their job was to be stewards—to care, tend, safeguard, cultivate, and protect all that were given to them on behalf of the landowner.

It's worth noting here that Jesus does not describe the evildoers in the story as thieves. They are not outsiders, instead they are the landowner's trusted tenants. He chose them, and granted them creative license to steward the vineyard for the benefit of all. How much more tragic, then, when they abuse the landowner's trust.

The analogy I'm drawing is of course obvious. How often have we, like the tenants in the parable, deluded ourselves into thinking that we "own" the earth and all that is in it, when in fact, we are meant to be stewards?

The truth is, we humans crave ownership. We are so used to being consumers who expect the best choices and prices. According to the International Monetary Fund, "Higher-income and developed nations like ours, generate significantly more waste per capita and total volume than developing countries." The *World Wildlife Fund* reported in 2025 that approximately 8 to 11 million tons of plastic waste enter the world's oceans every year, creating a cascading crisis that pushes vulnerable wildlife, including a quarter of all mammals, closer to extinction.

Have we forgotten our role as stewards?

Our earth is telling us to care for her, to live in harmony with her. How we act as consumers here in Southern California has a direct impact on people across the globe who supply our products. Our recent weather changes are a warning of our fragility, yet we continue to build on land that is collapsing, or take over more and more open land where wildlife and wild fires are prone. Science indicates that sea levels will continue to rise by 1 to 8 feet by the year 2100,” and wild fires will continue to increase.

Being a steward extends beyond our care for the planet. We are God’s stewards of the many incredible gifts and talents we possess. We are stewards of our money, our role as parents, our role as pet owners, our role as caregivers to aging parents and friends, as well as our role in caring for our own souls.

This month begins our annual Stewardship pledge campaign. Being a follower of Jesus was never about living in isolation. We are part of Christ’ body to grow his church in the world. Stewardship involves offering back to God our time, talent and treasure. Everyone’s situation is different. There are examples throughout the bible about stewardship. We have Lydia who was a successful business woman, generously supporting Paul’s missionary work. And there is the story of the poor

widow who gave all she had—often called the "widow's mite." They all have two things in common— they gave out of gratitude and generosity.

Recently, I scrolled through the many photos on my phone. It occurred to me how many people I know who have passed away. We have recently lost many high profile people in our society as well, including Gloria Steinem, Dolly Parton, the artist Peter Max, and costume designer Bob Mackie, along with many of your relatives and friends. James chapter four says, “**Why**, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” None of us can take anything with us, we only leave behind our legacy.

Scripture is clear: we are stewards only. If we are good stewards, our vineyards will thrive, but if we treat our vineyard as a cheap, inexhaustible commodity, it will not survive.

On this St. Francis day, this Gospel is a good reminder to be wise consumers and stewards of everything God has entrusted to us.

What legacy will we leave behind? Amen.