DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES

1. The desperate time
2. The desperate call
3. The desperate result?

Desperate people do desperate things. Imagine you were dying of a rare liver disease for which there was no cure. If someone told you that they had a new treatment that would be a great risk to you, wouldn't you take it? Most would. Desperate times call for desperate measures. You see examples of it every day.

Jesus was in a desperate situation. He had warned the teachers of the law and the chief priests time and again. He showed them he was the Christ. Their eyes and their ears told them the truth, but their hearts could not be convinced. Here it was Tuesday of Holy Week and they still did not believe. Now was not the time to beat around bush. Jesus had to lay it on the line with them. So Jesus told them this parable. We see DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES.

In parable Jesus told, there is a progression in the violence of the farmers. The first servant they simply beat and sent away empty-handed. The second servant they beat and humiliated and sent away empty handed. The third servant they beat so badly that it left him bloody and naked and then sent him away. Finally, when the owner sent his son, they took his life. With every gesture of patience and kindness on the part of the owner, the farmers become more and more violent.

Often when Jesus told a parable, the disciples would ask what it mean. Even the people did not often understand them. But here the religious leaders had no problem understanding it. They knew exactly what Jesus saying. He was summarizing the history of the spiritual leaders of the Jews. If you look at Old Testament history, the spiritual leaders were violent toward God's prophets from beginning to end.

And what was behind all of this? Greed. The farmers did not like the idea that the owner would ask for some fruits of his land back. They wanted to keep it all for selves. In a spiritual way, that is what drove the spiritual leaders of the Jews. All they cared about was to have the popularity of the people and all the honor and rewards that went with it. That was also the motivation behind the murder plot of Jesus. They even admitted: If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

The crowd was shocked. They said: May this never be! Even the common people understood what Jesus was saying. They were shocked that someone would be so greedy as to do such a thing to the Messiah, just for their own power!

But it is really not shocking. People will do incredibly evil things out of selfishness. We witness it every day. Co-workers backstab each other and do whatever they can to get ahead in the company. See same thing at school. Or many women terminate their pregnancy because it might crimp their lifestyle. Greed and selfishness will do amazingly evil things. Just as the farmers were more and more violent, we are experiencing more and more violent times.

This should not shock us because we have that same greed and self-ambition in our own hearts. The farmers did not like the idea that the owner should want just some of the fruit of his fields. God has every right to demand every penny that we earn, every minute of our lives to be dedicated to him. He could demand that each and every one of us become
missionaries, teachers and pastors. He could demand that we not get married and donate our full time and effort to the ministry.

But God does not do that. He allows us to serve at our jobs to the glory of his name. He allows us to have families and children and raise them to the glory of his name. He gives us the freedom to spend leisure time playing games and eating at restaurant. He does not ask for all of our money, but only the first and best of what we have to offer. Since he owns it all, God has the right to ask this of us.

Yet how often do we let our greed and selfishness get in the way of even this offering to God? When parents ask their kids to do a chore or two around the house, how many act as if they are being put to death? When God says in his Word that he wants the best of what you make, does that rub you the wrong way? A part of us thinks: That's not fair. It's my life, my decision! That is selfishness and greed. When we let that get the best of us, we get angry because we do not like the idea of the owner wanting some of the fruits of his harvest. So it is not surprising that the farmers would respond like that.

What is surprising is the reaction of the owner. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Instead of killing the farmers right away - which is what they deserved - he sent more servants to try and receive some fruit from them. It was a dangerous situation that was only getting worse.

But then he goes beyond all logic and decides to send his own son, whom he loves, to the farmers. What owner would be so patient and so loving? None. Any normal land owner would have killed them after their first strike. But the love of God is not logical. Moved by his love and mercy he decided to send his son. It was a final desperate act to try and save them. That is the shocking thing!

Here Jesus was living the parable. The Son of the owner was standing among the greedy tenants. He knew what they were plotting to do. But instead of sending them to hell right on the spot, Jesus warned them with a very clear parable. The love of God in this instance is shocking that Jesus would even bother warning them with this parable. If I knew someone was plotting my murder, I would have a hard time saving his life. That is how much Jesus cared! He still wanted them to see their sins and their need for a Savior.

Instead, we’re told: They looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. They knew the meaning of the parable, and yet in the hardness of their hearts they were all the more determined to see the parable come true. Instead of taking the warning, they were all more determined to try and steal the inheritance from God. They took the mercy of God and shoved it right back in his face!

But the most shocking thing in this whole story is that Jesus knew they would try to kill him and he let them. Why? So that he could die for their sins. Instead of condemning them on the spot, Jesus put their sins on his shoulders and died for them. That is incredible. What amazing grace!

The people just could not believe that someone could be so cold. Jesus then quoted Psalm 118. Told: Jesus looked directly at them and asked, Then what is the meaning of that which is written: The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

Notice Jesus looked them right in the eye. He was not messing around here. Jesus quoted a well-known Psalm that the people were used to singing all the time. It very clearly says that the builders - the religious leaders - would reject the capstone. The capstone
was the corner of the building by which all other bricks were to line up. If it was ajar, the building would be weak and collapse. As a result of that, their whole house would fall. That is what happened to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They would be dethroned and condemned because of their selfish and greedy rebellion. Just as Jesus warned the religious leaders, so Jesus was warning the people. He did not want them to fall into the same trap!

Did it work? Later when Jesus was before Pilate, the people joined the religious leaders in shouting: **Crucify him!** They too did not listen to this last ditch effort of Jesus to rebuke them. So what happened? Jesus said: **What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.** Many of the chief priests and their followers died in unbelief - eternally broken off from the love of God. It was not that God did not try. It was not that he did not care. He cared so much to send his only son not only to warn them, but also to even die for them. But instead of believing, they only rejected him as the Messiah.

It is a sad parable, but it has good news at the end. Look at what the owner does with the vineyard. Instead of just doing the work himself and enjoying the fruit for himself, he gives the vineyard to others! We are those **others** that God decided to give the vineyard. When the Jewish people and their spiritual leaders rejected Christ, God sent Paul to the Gentiles. God took the care of the vineyard from them and put it in our hands.

But we are unworthy. In sense, we were not God's first choice. He went out to the highways and the byways and found the biggest losers on earth - the least of the least - the worst of sinners - to take care of his vineyard! And here we are! God has given us the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He has given us Jesus' holiness. He has given us the Holy Spirit who brought us to faith. Talk about throwing pearls before swine! Instead of giving up, God in his mercy decided to give us - the Gentile swines - charge of his vineyard.

So how will we respond? Let's remember we could never earn the eternal salvation that Christ won for us. He does not want us to earn it and he does not ask us to earn it. But Jesus did it all for you. The Holy Spirit gave you faith in Christ. Although we are unworthy, God has put much time and effort into us. He prepared a wonderful vineyard of God's grace from you to eat from and enjoy! He gave you a solid foundation to go through life and death with. He went through desperate measures to make you his child. He patiently waited through your disobedience and rebellion. And now you stand before God's throne as sinners robed in the holiness of Christ. What a gift of God! You could never earn such a gift.

But you can appreciate it. By God's grace, you can produce the fruit that God enables you to. Or, like the Jews, you can abuse such a gift. You can tell God: **This is my life! It's all mine!** In other words, like the chief priests and teachers of the law, you can have the vineyard torn from your grip and given to someone else. There are only two things you can do with a bad example. Either you can follow it or learn from it. May we all trust in Christ, our cornerstone. We will never be put to shame. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill