

I should've known better than to click on the popup asking if my security was up to date. The logo of the company and the name didn't look familiar, but I wasn't paying that close of attention. As soon as I clicked I realized I probably made a mistake. They fooled me once. After spending an hour searching for the solution to get the computer back the way it was I'd have to be really foolish to click on the same popup. They won't fool me again. If they do, then shame on me for not learning my lesson.

God is not coming at us with a popup meant to harm us. His name is familiar. But many have felt fooled by God. They deny his request for a place in their lives because they say he offers no help. They've said "no" to the Almighty God because they think he allows innocent people to suffer. If good things had happened and God was behind them, and then they rejected when God came after them again, who would be the fool then?

Jesus in the gospel this morning tells a story that hits at the heart of any who hear it. It hits because in many ways it is unbelievable. The time was getting short for Jesus. He was just days away from the cross. But instead of living it up, he was teaching and urging those who had rejected him in the past. People needed to hear, we need to hear. Jesus talks about God...

**He sent servants then his son
Finding ridiculous cruelty
Showing ridiculous compassion**

The major components are simple, a landowner, a vineyard, tenants, and a long journey. Earthly concepts people could understand and be able to pull out the heavenly meaning. The landowner is the one taking the long journey. He rents out his vineyard to tenants. The only expectation is when the fruit comes in he might have a share in the harvest. But that's where things went bad. **"At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty handed."** That obviously wasn't the way this deal was to go down. Jesus was picturing something else.

In the time of the Old Testament, before Jesus was on the earth, the Jewish people were God's chosen people. Their religious leaders were in charge of keeping the people connected to God and worshiping him. But they sidestepped their responsibilities. God sent prophets in order to get them to do what they should've been doing. The religious leaders rejected the prophets, beat some of them up, and just didn't listen to their message. Rejection of a prophet was rejection of God. Jesus was picturing the religious leaders' continual rejection of the prophets.

Each servant in the story is met with ridiculous cruelty. **"He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out."** The treatment is shocking, but remember Jesus isn't telling this story so we get rightfully mad at those tenants. What kind of treatment have we shown to God when he comes after us? Do we have receptive hearts? The vineyard is where God wants us, in his kingdom of believers. But we've thought better, turned our backs, and gone our own way. We figure God doesn't care. He's not physically around. His rules seem over the top at times. We so naturally hate his rules that when he comes calling, we say forget it. What's hard to believe is the ridiculous cruelty of our sins against God. Most of them only you and God know. Any sin is rejection of him and is cruel.

Given the treatment of the first servant we would anticipate that would be the last servant sent. These wicked tenants are ridiculously cruel. Yet I can't seem to get over how ridiculous the actions of the landowner are. Why keep sending servants? Why not send the soldiers? Jesus is picturing God who kept sending prophets to the Jews in hopes they would listen to one and change their behavior. Some were beaten, some were jailed, and some were killed. Still God didn't send the soldiers to destroy them because he's ridiculously compassionate.

He's more than compassionate with us. Out of all the people on the face of this earth, God chose you to hear the gospel message of Jesus. He called you out of your sinful life into a brand new life by faith. He has been patient with you over and over again. He has repeatedly without fail come back at you with the Word of God. He sends family and friends to show you his compassion in Christ. He sends pastors and teachers who are willing to show you your sins and lead you to know forgiveness. God does this all because he is so ridiculously compassionate and in love with you.

A big hurdle recruiters for the military have to get over is not always the people they're recruiting. It's the parents. It's all the people that love and care for the recruit. They worry about their loved one going into combat. The landowner in Jesus' story hurdles right into sending the son he loves most of all into a situation in which he couldn't be sure he would be safe. That landowner represents God the Father. The Son represents Jesus. God the Father got to the point where sending the servants, the prophets, wasn't enough. It was time for him to send his Son.

Did you notice the ridiculous hope the landowner had when he sent the servants? Every time he sent a servant he was hopeful the tenants would change. But Jesus ramps up the ridiculousness. **"What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him."** Perhaps?! Perhaps?! This landowner is sending his son into battle basically, and all he relies on is perhaps. His patience is amazing. What's ridiculous is he had to try.

The son's appearance gets the tenants' attention. They know they essentially control the land. The landowner hasn't done anything about the mistreatment of servants so far. He's away on a journey. **"This is the heir, they said, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."** They felt empowered to kill the son. Sound familiar? It should because it did to the people listening to Jesus tell it. If the vineyard owner is God and the son whom he loves is the Son of God he sent into the world then the tenants are the Jewish religious leaders Jesus is now talking with. Jesus knows what they're thinking about doing. It hasn't happened yet, but it will in just days. Jesus tells them to their faces that he knows and they would be better not doing what they're thinking about doing.

God stopped sending prophets 400 years before Jesus. For 400 years the people had heard nothing from God. As shocking as that is, we haven't ever heard anything directly from God except what we read. That means if we don't believe the Bible, if we think there has to be something else, if we reject God's Word there isn't anything else. Jesus is it. We who are in church regularly might feel most secure but maybe are in more danger. We might have the most complacency or apathy. We might be falling into self righteous thinking. Our sins are so ridiculously cruel.

Did the tenants think they would get away with it? Were they that ridiculous? **"They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"** Jesus asked the people to answer. He's heightened the ridiculousness to get them to the right answer. We know it without reading. **He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."** They deserved death. Understand Jesus came to bring judgment on the earth. Not necessarily immediate, but soon. And Jesus came to bring life. He came to show God's ridiculous compassion.

God goes beyond any earthly relationship in sending his Son. God sent Jesus on a "perhaps" thought. Perhaps you might hear his Word and believe. But for God it wasn't wishful thinking. His Word has his power to lead people to believe, to lead you to believe. And when Jesus spoke of the heir being thrown out of the vineyard and killed he was speaking about himself. Jesus willingly will be led out of the city and crucified. He willingly gives his life for our sins so we might have forgiveness and be saved. The one rejected by many will be made the most critical part of God's plan to save us.

Hearing the message of ridiculous compassion from God to us in Christ leads to sorrow over sin and faith in the Savior. That produces fruit, the fruit God expected from us because of our faith, the fruit that he strengthens us to bring. His message of compassion and grace produces that fruit in our lives. We can give God the fruit that he asks for. It's all a gift of his ridiculous compassion so we can give it to him freely.

God acts ridiculous sometimes. Jesus tells a story where the ones picturing us act ridiculous in their cruelty just like we have in our sins. But God counteracts that with ridiculous compassion. God is determined, God is tireless, and God will keep coming after you. He has sent the servants and now sends the Son.