

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

A fool is someone who acts or speaks unwisely or rashly. Surely, no one wants to be thought a fool or called a fool. On the other hand, surely we also admit, perhaps with a bit of shame, that we have at times been foolish.

But what about God the Father, or Jesus His Son? Would you ever call the Father foolish, or the Son? Let me submit, and I don't think it's blasphemous to say it, that this parable is chock full of foolishness, and it's not all bad.

There are two main characters in the parable that Jesus tells today: there's the man who planted the vineyard and therefore is its owner — the text calls Him the *κύριος*, so let's call Him the master, and there's those to whom the master let the vineyard out that they might tend the vines. They're called the tenants in our text; they're tenant farmers. To be sure, there are other characters — the Son not the least of them — but the main characters are the master and the tenant farmers.

And both of these act foolishly, it seems to me—not in everything, but in significant ways. The master leases his vineyard to farmers and expects for his payment a share in the proceeds. That is, these farmers were to care for the vineyard, harvest a crop, and return some of the proceeds back to the master. Nothing unusual there, nor foolish. It wasn't foolish, either, for the master of vineyard to send a servant to ask for his share of the fruit of the vineyard. You could imagine that's exactly how this transaction was supposed to take place.

On the other hand, the tenant farmers worked to care for the vineyard so that it would produce an abundant crop. That's not at all unusual, either. All this is happening just like farmers do it to this day. My brother Dan is such a farmer, and he works hard in various fields all over McLean and Woodford Counties in Illinois to make a living from the earth. He's contracted with the owners (my mother, an uncle, and others) to work the ground and give them a portion of the harvest.

But the foolishness begins when the tenant farmers wickedly beat the master's servant and sent him back to the master empty-handed. What did the master do? It sounds foolish: he sent another servant. And the farmers did worse things and sent him away empty. Still more foolishness...the master sent a third servant. What was the master thinking? The tenant farmers did the same to him and worse. Perhaps you're thinking "foolish" is not strong enough! He's crazy. Einstein is credited with saying that, "*the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.*"

But it gets worse, for the master was not done. The master pondered, "*What shall I do?*" A reasonable person, you may be thinking, would come in with soldiers or law officers and destroy those wicked tenants. But he didn't. Instead, he said, "*I*

think ‘I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him’.” That is, perhaps they will see the error of their ways when they see the son and be shamed into turning from their wickedness.

What utter nonsense, we may think to ourselves. What a fool the master was, for he was dealing not just with wicked tenants but foolish ones. Instead of feeling shame, they salivated over what their dastardly deeds might bring them. They thought, “*This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.*” Were they fools? Does that make sense? Kill the son, and somehow you’ll receive the inheritance? Or maybe they weren’t so foolish after all, for they had mistreated three servants already, and the master had done nothing. Maybe they would get the inheritance by default if they kill the son.

Well, Jesus stopped the parable there and asked what the master should do. He didn’t give the people a chance to answer: “*the foolish master got what he deserved.*” No, He answered, and the wicked and foolish tenants were the focus of His condemnations — rightly so. “[*The master*] will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

“*May it never be,*” was the people’s pious response, or as our text translates it, “*surely not.*” Wisely, they wanted no part of this foolishness. But the foolish Jewish leaders “*perceived that he had told this parable against them,*” and so they who had mistreated the prophets now “*sought to lay hands on [Jesus] at that very hour ... They watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.*” Amazingly, fulfilling what Jesus had just foretold them about this foolishness, they wanted to cast Jesus out of the city and kill Him — and the events at the end of that holy week testify to the fact that they did just that. They rejected the stone, but in that rejection rejoice, for Jesus became our salvation, the cornerstone upon which the church is built.

On the other hand, when it comes to the master of the vineyard, surely we agree that what He did seems foolish: sending not just one but three servants to be abused and rejected; and then sending His own beloved Son to be killed. And don’t fret about it even though the connections are obvious: the master of the vineyard is the Father in heaven, who sent prophet after prophet to Israel seeking the good fruit of justice and righteousness, but finding only the wild grapes of bloodshed and outcry.

In foolishness according to worldly wisdom, He sent His own beloved Son, calling for repentance and the fruit of faith. He received, instead of this fruit, mockery and shame, smiting and cross. This “*word of the cross*” does sound like “*folly to those who are perishing.*” “*Christ crucified*” is “*a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.*” But this message of God’s folly is “*to us who are being*

*saved*” *“the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* It just goes to show us what our wisdom is compared to the foolishness of God. *“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.”* These are St. Paul’s words, of course. So you see, it’s not blasphemous to say that the Father in heaven seems foolish. It does sound foolish, but that’s to men who hear with fallen reason, who must humble themselves and admit that *“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, it’s even worse than that: it sounds crazy for the Father to send His own beloved Son after all that rejection. You know, sometimes you’ll hear someone describe a guy who has really fallen for a girl as being “crazy about her.” And isn’t that also the point? God is crazy...crazy in love for you, and that’s how He expressed His love: *“God loved the world in this way, that He gave His only-begotten Son,”* sent Him with the purpose of being lifted up on the cross to suffer and die in foolishness for you, *“that [you who] believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

To which I say, *“give me this foolishness. I want more of the crazy love of God in Christ Jesus,”* knowing that *“according to worldly standards,”* I, too, will be thought of as foolish. But that’s okay, in this instance, for there’s a new Vine in the Lord’s vineyard — better than the choice vines He planted before, this Vine is the true Vine. The Father Himself is the vinedresser, and He has grafted us by Holy Baptism onto this Vine. Yes, this is one time I don’t mind being thought of or called a fool (you don’t, either, I submit), for it’s not by the world’s wisdom that I come to understand the things of the Spirit of God, that I believe in the folly of Christ crucified. Rather, it’s the working of God, in the foolish word proclaimed, the foolish word attached to water and bread and wine, that we are attached and remain attached to Christ, that as living branches of this Vine we are truly His disciples, fools for Christ Crucified, bearing the fruit of righteousness, *“not ... a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith,”* and pressing *“on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,”* *“the resurrection from the dead.”*

Therefore, we pray, Lord keep us from being fools in opposition to Christ and His Gospel, but grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may ever be broken in repentance on Christ the cornerstone and rejoice in the foolishness of our salvation in Christ the crucified.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.