

We've been living with this pandemic for more than six months...
I've heard your cries

*I have no life...
I hate this isolation...
I hide behind a mask...
I touch... no one ...*

*I want my old life back.
I want ball games with fans in the stands...
I want to see smiles...
I want to feel hugs...*

*I cry out... to God...
Show me a way out of this!
Tell me what you want me to do!
But God is silent....*

Or is He?

*I am the Lord your God
you shall have no other gods before me.*

You shall not make for yourself an idol.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The Ten Commandments...

The first tablet... *How to Love God*

The second tablet... *How to Love Each Other*

God *has* spoken to his people... *and that includes all of you... and me.*
With *Specific* instructions... *what to do...*

Delivered with thunder and lightning and smoke
No wonder stood back... trembling with fear...
*Moses... Speak to us, and we will listen...
but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.*

With a calm, comforting voice Moses reassured them...
*Do not be afraid...
for God has come only to test you
and to put the fear of him upon you
so that you do not sin.*

And as soon as the thunder and lightning and smoke went away...
The people returned to their old sinful ways.

The Old Testament... is a continuous spiral
Sin... Punishment... Repentance... Blessing...
Sin... Punishment... Repentance... Blessing...
Sin... Punishment... Repentance... Blessing...

A vicious cycle... unbroken for thousands of years...

And then... along comes Jesus...

In today's Gospel... Jesus told a parable set in a vineyard:

Before the owner left the country, he hired tenants to tend the vines.

When he sent slaves to pick up his wine...

the Hired hands beat them and killed them.

So he the land owner sent more people...

They did the same thing again

When the owner sent his own son, the tenants killed him, too!

The stage is set... and Jesus asked...

What will the owner do?

If it were ***your*** vineyard... What would ***you*** do?

There's a fable about the Angel Gabriel...

After surveying the earth and its people he reported back to God.

***Lord, it's my duty to inform you
that you possess of a choice piece of real estate
known as planet earth.***

But the tenants you've leased it out to are destroying it.

In another few years, it won't be fit to live in.

They have polluted your rivers.

The air is fouled with the stench of hatred.

They frequently kill one another,

and all your prophets met with violence.

By any rule of sound management, Lord,

You have just one option.

Gabriel raised his trumpet...

Shall I sound the eviction notice now, sir?

And God said,
No, Gabriel! No, not just yet.
I know you are right, but I keep thinking
if I just give them a little more time
they'll quit acting like they own the place!

The vineyard doesn't belong to the tenants
 The vineyard belongs to the landowner

In other words,
 Everything we have
 Everything that we create
 Every piece of fruit that we bring to fullness
 Belongs to God
 It is not ours
 It is God's

Shortly after I was called as rector of St. Gabriel's,
 My wife Kate and I had dinner with the former rector,
 Father Richard and his wife Judy.

I hoped he would offer some special insight about the people here
 Something about how things work
 Something he gained from his 31 years as rector.

He gave me just one directive. Only one.
Never forget. This is not your church. This is God's church.

The same is true for those workers in the vineyard
 In both Matthews time... and in our time.

God's Church... God's city... God's planet...

We are all God's guests here...

Temporary workers...

And... like it or not... We *all* report to the Father in heaven

If the people in Matthew's vineyard had been obedient to the landowner
Would things have turned out differently?

If they hadn't killed the slaves and messengers and the landowner's son
Would things have turned out differently?

Obedience... is a choice...

Just as sin... is a choice...

Uncertainty... is part of life... especially in 2020!

We have no idea what's coming next...

Nor do we have control over it...

Nut we can control... our choices...

We can choose to follow God's commandments

We can choose to turn away from sin

We can choose to accept Jesus as our savior

We can believe that God is in control

And we can find peace in that...

No matter what comes next...

We can face it with positive attitudes

Because we KNOW... how deeply God loves us...