Hi,

Whoa . . . this is email #20 and we are far from done with this isolation. So stay strong, spend real time in Scripture, pray the Psalms, and reach out to those who are especially isolated.

Here are today’s updates:

* Today’s Genesis class will be at 11:45, on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). You do not need a Facebook account to view the class, but you will need an account to comment. Just follow the link to my page. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s recordings will be up by the end of the day on Wednesday.

After turning over the tables of the moneychangers on Monday, Jesus headed back to the Temple on Tuesday for a day of confrontations with the Jewish leaders.

***Matthew 21:33-46 (NRSV)***

**33“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ 39So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.40Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41They said to Jesus, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”**

**42Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:**

**‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;**

**this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?**

**43Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. 44The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”**

**45When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.**

This parable is part of an extended confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leadership, represented by the temple priests and the Pharisees. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to adoring crowds on a Sunday (Matt. 21), which we call Palm Sunday. The first thing Jesus does after his arrival is to head for the temple, where he invokes the words and actions of the prophet Jeremiah, who, 600 years before, had his own confrontation with the temple leadership. The next morning, Jesus returns to the temple where the “chief priests and elders” question his authority. Whose authority underlies Jesus’ words and actions? The leaders know full well that Jesus says and does what only God ought to say and do and they want to know what or whom Jesus claims as his authority.

Jesus replies to this challenge by turning the tables and asking the “chief priests and elders” a question that they refuse to answer: “Who authorized the baptisms performed by John the Baptizer: heaven or humans?” Then, in the face of their silence, Jesus launches into three parables. The first one is about two sons. The first refuses to work in his father’s vineyard but later changes his mind and heads to the vines. The second son says he will go work, but he doesn’t. Jesus asks which man does his father’s will. The leaders can’t help but answer that it is the first, for, even though refusing at first, the man eventually goes to work. This first parable, like those that follow is a warning about God’s rejection of Israel’s leadership; i.e., the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and the rest. It is the “sinners and tax collectors” who, though rejecting God at first, now embrace Jesus and his inauguration of God’s kingdom. Conversely, like the second son, the leaders claim to be leading the people to God but are actually leading them away, refusing to do the work of the kingdom brought to them by Jesus. Then Jesus launches right into another parable, often referred to as the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.

*The wicked tenants*

The context of this parable, falling in the midst of a direct confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, guides our interpretation of the parable. The landowner is God and the vineyard is God’s people. Indeed, the parable’s first verse is based directly on Isaiah 5, a song about an unfruitful vineyard (an unjust people). Thus, the wicked tenants are not the people themselves, but the leaders, both spiritual and political, who have repeatedly refused to understand God’s Law and God’s work. Instead, they exile his prophets and rebel against his son.

When the landowner turns the vineyard over to new management, it is God opening his kingdom to those who embrace both God’s work and God’s son. It is a mistake to see this parable as speaking of God transferring the vineyard from the Jews to the Gentiles. Rather, it is the Jewish leadership that is in Jesus’ sight. Leadership of the vineyard is going to be given to a new crew, to those who will lead God’s reconstituted people forward in a unity built on faith in Jesus Christ.

*A message for all*

Jesus spoke this parable as a clear warning to those who had been leading Israel toward destruction rather than restoration. Jeremiah had confronted Israel’s leaders and was imprisoned for it. Jesus’ confrontation with them would lead him to a Roman cross only a few days later.

But it would be a mistake to hear this as a message only for the leaders. Had the Jews done what God had expected of them, loving God and neighbor? Had they embraced and protected Jeremiah? They had welcomed Jesus on Sunday. Would them embrace him on Friday? Would the disciples themselves stand with him before the high priest, Caiaphas, or would they hide and even deny them knew him?

It can be so hard to know what you have when you’ve got it, much less act on it. How good are we at discerning God’s word today and heeding it? Do we strive to learn more so that we can be more discerning? Do we see the world through God-shaped glasses or “real world” glasses? Do we run our lives based on the world’s priorities or upon God’s? Do we stand up for the weak and oppressed, for those who can’t stand up for themselves? Do we really appreciate all that God had given us, even in the high anxiety of the moment? Questions such as these are not only for the “leaders,” they are questions for us all.

*A movie recommendation*

Some humor in these times is always welcome. So . . . if you didn’t see *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* when it came out in 2017, take a couple of hours and watch it. It stars Dwayne Johnson, Kevin Hart, Jack Black, and Karen Gillan. It is a hoot. But don’t mistake it with the new one that came out in 2019 -- not nearly as funny.

*A book recommendation*

One of the most popular thriller writers of the last two decades is Lee Child, creator of Jack Reacher, a giant of a man committed to righting wrongs. Child has written more than twenty Reacher novels. I’ve listened to all of them while I walk. If you want to try one, you might as well start at the beginning with *Killing Floor*. It was my doctor of more than thirty years that got me started on them.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott