

Sunday 4th October 2026; Benefice BCP Holy Communion, Stonegrave.

It is very fitting as we enter our season of Harvest and the celebration of Creation services that today the Church remembers St Francis of Assisi. We often picture Francis surrounded by birds and animals, praising God for the beauty of creation, as we will sing of in our final hymn today. Yet his love for creation grew from something deeper: a life of prayer. Francis would spend long hours before God, returning to two simple questions: “Who are you, God? And who am I?”

Those questions also open today’s Gospel, Jesus tells of a landowner who plants a vineyard, equips it carefully, leases it to tenants, and goes away. At harvest time he sends servants to receive its fruit. The tenants beat one servant, kill another, and stone a third. More servants are sent, and they receive the same treatment. Finally, the owner sends his son, saying, “They will respect my son.” Instead, the tenants kill him too. The parable first tells us who God is. God is the owner of the vineyard: generous enough to plant it, patient enough to entrust it to others, and persistent in seeking its fruit. The vineyard is not abandoned simply because the owner is unseen; neither is our world abandoned when God seems distant. Everything we possess—our time, abilities, money, relationships, church, and the earth itself—is held in trust. We are stewards, not owners. The tenants’ tragedy begins when stewardship turns into possession. They mistake the owner’s patience for absence and his trust for weakness. We face the same temptation whenever we say, “This is mine,” “This is how we have always done it,” or “We don’t need to pray.” Gratitude then gives way to entitlement, and God’s gifts are closed against our neighbour.

The parable also tells us who Jesus is. He is the beloved Son, sent not with an army but in vulnerable love. Jesus tells this story only days before he is rejected and killed. The cross reveals both the seriousness of human rebellion and the astonishing mercy of God. We grasp at the vineyard, yet God gives the Son. We refuse the fruit that is due, yet Christ offers his life for sinners. The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone; death does not have the final word.

So, who are we? We are tenants invited to receive God's generosity and return its fruit. The fruit God seeks is not religious busyness, but justice, mercy, faithfulness, reconciliation, generosity, and love. It appears when we feed the hungry, listen to the lonely, forgive an old wound, welcome the overlooked, care for creation, or use our influence for another's good. Because judgment is not immediate, faithfulness can feel optional. Yet delay is not absence. Jesus' warning is not meant to make us calculate dates or live in panic, but to wake us from the illusion that tomorrow is guaranteed and our choices do not matter. The good news is that God's call to account is also a call home. Repentance means returning the vineyard to its rightful owner and discovering that we were never meant to carry the burden of ownership. This week, that may mean giving time we guard too tightly, sharing money we treat as entirely our own, repairing a neglected relationship, or tending a corner of God's creation. Faithfulness begins with the next gift placed back into God's hands.

"Who are you, God? And who am I?" God is the loving owner who creates, entrusts, sends, forgives, and will finally set all things right. We are beloved tenants: accountable, certainly, but also trusted. We do not bear fruit to purchase God's love; we bear fruit because that love has already been poured into our lives through Christ. The owner has not forgotten the vineyard, and the Son who was rejected is risen and present among us. St Francis

understood this freedom. Because the world and his life belonged to God, he could receive creation with wonder and spend himself in service. His prayer leads us to humility: God is Creator, Redeemer, and Lord; we are creatures, forgiven sinners, and servants entrusted with holy work. That gives our lives both their proper limits and their deepest purpose. Therefore, as we enter this season of thanksgiving for God's creation, let us expect the owner—not with dread, but with hope. Let us receive each person, task, and part of creation as entrusted to our care. Let us ask not, "How much can I keep?" but "What fruit can I offer?" When we fail, let us turn again to the Son, whose grace makes barren ground fruitful. May our homes, our church, and our common life become a harvest of love for God and our neighbour. Thanks be to God. Amen.