Sermon from
October 4, 2026
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Amy Vigesaa

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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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“How can you not believe in God when octopuses DREAM and otters have a favorite rock they carry around in a little SKIN POCKET and cows have BEST FRIENDS and bees are out there communicating the coordinates of flowers through INTERPRETIVE DANCE and they have REGIONAL DIALECTS?

Cats are PURRING at frequencies associated with bone healing??? Forests get absolutely incinerated and respond by growing FLOWERS??? Dolphins literally invent NAMES for themselves and yell them across the ocean??? Penguins are waddling around Antarctica looking for the PERFECT LITTLE ROCK to give their beloved?

CROWS REMEMBER YOUR FACE. THEY TELL OTHER CROWS ABOUT YOU. THEY TELL THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT YOU. YOU CAN HAVE GENERATIONAL BEEF WITH A BIRD.

Goats have ACCENTS. Rats GIGGLE when you tickle them. Elephants mourn their dead. Whales make SONGS and then OTHER WHALES LEARN THE SONG and suddenly everybody across the ocean is singing the new hit single.

Monarch butterflies are born knowing how to fly thousands of miles to a place THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN. Sea turtles hatch out of an egg, immediately sprint toward an OCEAN they have never seen, disappear into it for like THIRTY YEARS and then somehow come back to THE SAME BEACH?

Birds can see COLORS THAT WE CANNOT SEE. There are colors happening RIGHT NOW that we don't even get to know about.

There are sea slugs that eat algae and STEAL ITS CHLOROPLASTS and then are just like great thanks I'll be PHOTOSYNTHESIZING NOW. There are mushrooms communicating underground. There are seeds sitting in the dirt for DECADES like no actually I will wait.

Squirrels plant MILLIONS OF TREES because they simply cannot remember where they put their snacks.

A CATERPILLAR GOES INTO A LITTLE BAG, DISSOLVES MOST OF ITS BODY INTO ORGANIC SOUP, REARRANGES ITSELF, GROWS WINGS AND THEN LEAVES.

And you're telling me a tiny acorn knows how to become a 70-foot oak tree? Nobody tells it what to do?!

It just has TREE INSTRUCTIONS INSIDE IT?

Your body started as ONE CELL. ONE. And that cell divided itself into a brain that can think about its own existence and eyes that can look at stars and hands that can hold somebody else's hands and a heart that runs on ELECTRICITY without you even asking it to?

The iron in your BLOOD was made inside a STAR.

We are walking around on a wet rock covered in bioluminescent oceans and singing whales and laughing rats and birds holding lifelong grudges and flowers exploding out of FIRE and somehow we're supposed to act like this is a normal place to live?" -that is from a Facebook post by a woman named Jade Nutt.

We have been given a place to inhabit and tend that is amazing and beautiful and wild and intricately designed. And it is loved by the Creator. It is not ours. And yet, with everything in us, we try to possess it; to own it; to make it work for us, on our behalf, for our sake.

Our parable today contrasts the landowner's care and preparation of a vineyard with the violent acts of the tenants. It contrasts hope of a fruitful vineyard with the judgement of wicked tenants. The violence and wickedness of the tenants is hard to comprehend and at the same time, it is something prevalent and real in our own day and age. We can certainly read the symbolism and know that the vineyard represents Israel. All throughout the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as a vineyard of God's making. We can read the symbolism and also be right to assume the tenants refer to the corrupt leaders of the day- the chief priests and Pharisees. We can also see a clear comparison of the servants beaten and killed with the prophets of God over the centuries receiving a violent end. We would also be right to understand Jesus as the Son who is ultimately thrown outside the gates and killed. Through this parable, Jesus was passing judgment on the leaders of his

day in how they failed with what God entrusted to them in Israel. Author and theologian, Debie Thomas helps us find ourselves in this text. She says,

"What the tenants in the story neglect to understand — or very deliberately choose to ignore — is that they are *stewards* rather than *owners* of the vineyard. When the landowner asks for his rightful share of the harvest, the tenants take offense. As if the vineyard belongs to them, and it is the landowner who is in the wrong for making a claim on the land at all. Somewhere along the way, the tenants have forgotten their place. Their vocation. Their standing in relationship to both the land and the landowner. To put it bluntly, they have forgotten that they own nothing — *nothing at all.* Everything belongs to the landowner. Theirs is not a vocation of ownership; it is a vocation of caring, tending, safeguarding, cultivating, and protecting — on behalf of another.

It's worth noting here that Jesus does not describe the evildoers in the story as thieves or marauders. They are not outsiders — they are the landowner's trusted tenants. He *chose* them and granted them creative license to steward the vineyard for the benefit of all."

In early August, I spent a week at a retreat center near Windom, MN, called Shalom Hill Farm. Every day I was able to go for walks in the prairie and spend time with my thoughts and with God. Along the trails there were stations for walkers to pause and read a reflection. One read like this, it's written by Metta Herrick Carlson,

> When we listen for the seasons
> Every step upon the earth is a prayer.

Mud squishes and grass swishes
Leaves crinkle and snow crunches
These are the very first psalms.
Recite a parable about fruit and seed,
Land and caretakers, grain and harvest.
It does not need to be verbatim
To be true and faithful, for it to recognize
your own movement within this piece.

I picked a stem of prairie grass and held it between my fingers as I walked. And I wondered about this small piece of creation in my hand- and thought, maybe that's what God entrusts us with, just a small portion of the creation, of the kingdom, of the vineyard to tend. Not the whole thing, just a piece our size. God entrusts us to care for all of God's creation- from the land, sky, sea, and creatures, to the well-being of humanity and the kingdom of God. We are stewards of all God gives. *And* we have a role of continuing to tend and nurture the part of God's world we can- that we are close to, that we inhabit. We have a responsibility to care for what God cares about; to remember nothing belongs to us but is only entrusted to us.

The problem is we crave possession and ownership. This week, the ELCA, our parent organization, held a Day of Remembrance to acknowledge our history and the part our ancestors played in the boarding schools that erased the culture and identity of countless First Nation children. Our ancestors took possession of the land, but that wasn't enough. They took children from their

homes and made them into what they believed to be more civilized and they used religion as a weapon to do so. This is part of our history of which we repent, and we move forward in a way that supports a hopeful future- not only for us, but all the people suffering from our past sins. Like the wicked tenants, we so often kill the messenger who tells us what we have isn't ours, that we have to share and relinquish the things we've worked for, the things we've tended, the things we want to keep for ourselves because what they say doesn't feel like Good News.

It is a challenge.

One of my favorite movies is "Project Hail Mary." In this movie, the goal is to save planet earth. One woman, Eva Stratt, is put in charge to pull together the best people from around the world, to draw from the best minds and the bravest hearts to complete an impossible mission: Project Hail Mary. In one scene, as Stratt calculates the time they have left and the urgency of the mission, she explains to Dr. Grace that during the length of the mission the people of earth will be dying, and resources will become limited- at best they will have 25 years and that's if all the nations agree to share their resources with the rest of the world- which they won't. They won't do it, she laments. More will die. It is a bleak picture of the future.

The Good News of being good stewards of what God has given us is life for all. When we tend the earth and nurture the kingdom of God, sharing the fruits

and the richness of the vineyard, we all get to live. We all experience life and fullness and hope and goodness. Not just some of us, but all of us. That's how God designed things and it's the best way. It's a hopeful future. It's a hopeful future when we learn to be good stewards of what God has entrusted of us. It's a hopeful future when we receive the messengers and the Son with a warm welcome and listen to what they say. It's a hopeful future when we share what we have with others. It's a hopeful future when we give back to God what belongs to God. Nothing belongs to us. It's God's, and that's actually good news for all of us. Amen