Isaiah: 5. 1-7, Philippians: 3. 4b – 14.

St Matthew, Ch. 21, 33-46 (St James, 4/10/26).

A story attributed to the German Master Storytellers, The Brothers Grimm, talks about two brothers. One was rich and the other poor. The poor one was a peasant and toiled by tilling the land; growing turnips and other vegetables. As it happened one of his turnips grew so enormous that it took a cart drawn by two oxen to transport it. He didn't want to eat it and he didn't want to sell it, so he decided to give it as a present to the king. The king marvelled at the extraordinary object and suggested the peasant must be very lucky. Oh no, said the peasant, lucky I am certainly not. I am a poor man tilling the earth. I have nothing, and I am forgotten by all. The king pitied him and gave him plenty of gold, land, fields and flocks.

When his wealthy brother heard what riches his poor sibling had acquired with a single turnip, he envied him and pondered how he might acquire more than his brother did. Instead of a single turnip the other brother presented the king with gold and horses, hoping for a larger gift than his brother's in return. The king took the present saying that he would give him in return... nothing rarer or better than the huge turnip. So, the rich brother had to put his brother's turnip into a cart and have it taken home.

One way to interpret the story would be to say that the poor brother gave a generous and selfless gift to the king and received a fortune in return. His older and wealthier brother wanted to make himself rich by giving a gift and ended up with a more or less useless object. Alternatively, we could also question the purity of the poor brother's gift. With his extraordinary turnip he may have tried to ingratiate himself to the king and managed to succeed. He may

have been giving just as selfishly as his brother but was much shrewder. He wasn't giving to honour the king but manipulating him into giving something in return. Under the guise of giving, they were both trying to get. This all brings us to motives.

Motives govern the parable in our gospel reading today. I thought as I read it how very violent it is. I wondered also how the owner of the vineyard came to entrust his vineyard to such people. Their motive was to do away with the honest and the good and take possession of the vineyard themselves.

Of course, we're to understand that the owner of the vineyard is God and the people are his chosen ones and among them are the group called Pharisees, the people who studied the law and held important positions in Jewish worship. What Jesus is saying, under the umbrella of this parable, is that the people to whom God has given much have responded in hateful and thankless ways. For a start they mistreated the prophets, one after another, whom God had sent to them and paid no attention to the ways of justice and righteousness. Their motives, like the tenants in the vineyard, were a result of their envy and jealousy. Jesus begins to speak of himself as he refers to the Son whom they killed.

God entrusts us all with a responsibility to respect what has been given to us. Relatively speaking we're all fairly well off, compared to many others we come across. But we are expected to show our appreciation of God's bounty and to give thanks. Last week, for the churches' harvest festival, a great effort was made in celebrating and giving offerings, of showing gratitude and sharing with others what we've been given.

May our motives, in our giving and our sharing, be pleasing in the sight of God.

Amen.