Grace and peace from our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

I arrived in the U.S. in March. I’ve learned now that March can be a dreary month, but I didn’t understand that when I first arrived. On my second day here, I asked my wife, “Sarah, why are all of the trees here dead? I don’t understand.” She explained the seasons and the trees would return to life soon. I have to admit, I didn’t believe her. Later that day, our friend Kendra came to visit. She had the same answer. I didn’t believe her. Next, Betterae came to visit. I made my wife translate as I asked Betterae, “Why are all of the trees dead?” My wife rolled her eyes as she translated the same answer I had already heard about the coming of spring. Finally, later that week, my friend Pastor Walter from El Salvador came to visit. I asked him. He explained it to me, and at last I believed. I didn’t believe the local people, including my wife, but at last I believed my fellow Salvadoran. He admitted his mother had the same question and thought that the Americans were wasteful because they were not using all of these dead trees for firewood.

As we so often see in the parables of Jesus, he uses situations that were commonplace during his time to get his teaching across to the people. In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who decided to invest a lot of time and money to build a vineyard. The man prepared the land, put a fence on it, planted it, and put a tower on it to supervise the operation. This man was deeply excited by this project. Probably the same joy God felt when saw the completed Garden of Eden.

But it turns out that he had to leave the city, and he found it necessary to hire some people to manage the project. A problem arose when the time came for the owner to collect his share of the harvest. He sent his servants to collect the fruits from them.

But some of the messengers were killed, stoned and others were beaten. Finally, the rich man, seeing that they were not listening to the servants, sent his son, thinking that his son represented his own authority and would be listened to and respected, but sadly the son received the worst treatment of all and he was killed.

Jesus tells this parable in the temple. A group of religious leaders in the temple who were listening to the message, understood 100% that this message was directed to them, and they became angry with him. The anger was so great that even they really wanted to put him in prison. Only because he was telling them the truth through the parable. Judgment through the gospel had come to them. But they, in their selfishness, blindness and in their world full of illusions, left behind the responsibility that had been given to them to feed the people with spiritual food. God expected them to produce fruit from the land they had received.

We are the farmers who live in the vineyard of the Lord. And just as the rich man sent messages to the farmers, God continues to send his message to all of us in many ways. We need to be open to receive his message, even when it makes us uncomfortable. We know God wants us to love our neighbors, but that is not always easy to do. If it is sometimes hard to love our neighbor, it is often impossible to love our enemies. Yet God calls us to do that very thing. We know God wants us to share what we have with those that are less fortunate, but often the temptations of an expensive vacation or buying the latest style of clothing are often difficult to overcome. Even when the church is asking for help with Girl Scout projects, lunch programs in Tanzania, supporting the Outreach for Hope Bike Ride, the youth gathering and so many other projects, we can feel like it is too much and decide not to help at all.

Sometimes we find ourselves closer to the Pharisees who reject the message of God. But just as I learned to finally listen and accept the fact that the trees were not actually all dead, we can change our minds in those moments of weakness when we are tempted to follow a path different than the path God wants for us. One thing we know about God’s love for us is that it is never too late. Brothers and sisters, let us continue to listen to the voice of our cornerstone Jesus in our own lives and to follow and share his teachings with others.

May the grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all.