

Reap me the Earth



When talking about winemaking and vineyards the French use the word, 'terroir'. Related to our 'territory' it is connected to the notion of the land.

It means a great deal more than just the size and shape of the patch of land on which the vines are cultivated. It is connected to the unique quality of the soil which gives life to the plant including details of the mineral and loam make-up.

The micro-climate particular to that area of land helps determine the terroir with all the influences of how the sunshine angles down upon the slopes and flat of the ground. Rainfall can be slightly different depending upon local geography

A multitude of factors giving a character to a terroir are highly prized in producing a particular wine. All this influences which grapes are to be grown and how the rows of vines are to be laid out and the precise timing of harvest.

We might imagine rich soil, lots of rain to encourage big juicy fruit, and golden sunshine, is what is needed. It is much more complicated than that. Sometimes the most unlikely land is best, or the harshest climate produces the grapes perfect for wine.

These days, it is multi-million pound business, but it is also a matter of tradition, pride and love.

Making wine goes back thousands of years and the skills and knowledge that go into it have been developed slowly and carefully. In the time of Jesus certain wines were prized and priced above others just as they are today.



We hear in all the readings about an idea embedded in the culture of all Mediterranean people including the Jews - the vineyard. In the scriptures it became a model for how God cares for and cultivates the world. The land and its climate is specially chosen for a particular grape that is to grow. The land is the Promised Land, and the grape is the Chosen People.

Jesus put a twist to the whole image as he told his parable.



We are given details of the establishment of the vineyard. It is fenced round – a specially chosen place that is carefully protected. A tower is built. This would, no doubt, contain the winepress but it is no low-slung affair, it is a tower. This is so that the vineyard can be watched over, delighted in, and guarded.

The parable differs from the images in the first reading from Isaiah. The prophet speaks of sour grapes and a crop that God, the vineyard owner, does not want. In Jesus' story, the owner of the vineyard knows that the right kind of grape will be harvested and the kind of wine that he wants which will, in due course, be produced.

In the parable of Jesus, the failure to obtain the wine is not the fault of the terroir, nor the type of vine planted. The problem lies with those supposed to bring in the harvest and make the wine.

It is about those who are called to work in the vineyard of the Lord and how others may be needed if the harvest of the kingdom is not delivered.

We are told the tenants ignored and mistreated the servants sent by the owner and killed his son. Jesus was speaking of those given the task to produce the harvest in his own day and predicting what they would do to him. But the parable was given not only to comment about events in the time of Jesus; it speaks to us.

It is to make me think of what I do to help in bringing the harvest home.

I am also to ponder how I am called to produce a harvest with the territory, climate, and make-up of my life. I might be tempted to think that I don't have much to start out with or everything so frustrates me that I cannot be expected to produce very much.

The parable tells us that God knows precisely what kind of terroir we are and how good the wine can be that will come from our lives. It may be the most unlikely ground and perhaps the least favourable conditions that can return the best wine.