The parable of the tenants

Mark 12: 1-12

(Mother sitting with son at her feet – with Bible on knee)

Mother To-night's Bible story is called “The parable of the tenants”. Do you remember what a parable is, John?

John I think so, Mum. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning - Jesus told parables. But what are "tenants"?

Mother A tenant is someone who rents land.

John Oh, I see - the way our neighbour rents our field and grazes his cattle on it?

Mother Yes that's right. Only in this story, it was a vineyard that was rented. Listen to what Jesus said; - "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey".

(Mother and son remain on the edge of the stage and watch as the story unfolds.)

(Enter owner and two tenants.)

Owner Right, then, that's all settled. You will look after the vineyard for me while I am away. I will take a percentage of the crop as rent, and you can have the rest for your work.

Tenant 1 Agreed!

Tenant 2 That seems fair enough.

(Owner and tenants shake hands to settle the deal. Tenants enter vineyard and owner moves off stage.)

(Owner re-enters with servant)
Owner   I want you to go back to that vineyard I planted. It is harvest time, and the crops should be ready for picking. Bring me my share of the crop from those tenants.

Servant 1 Yes, master. I will leave right away.

(Servant walks to vineyard and enters it)

Servant 1 My master has sent me to collect his share of the fruit. Is it ready for him?
Tenant 1 We worked for that crop. I don't see why we should hand it over to anyone. Come on, Get him!

(The two tenants seize the servant, beat him up, and throw him out of the vineyard. He picks himself up and limps back to his master.)

Owner What happened to YOU? Were you attacked on the journey?
Servant 1: No, master. Your tenants did this to me. They just beat me up and threw me out. I didn't get any fruit.
Owner They agreed to give me my share of the fruit as rent. I will send someone bigger than you. Come here, Joshua.

(enter servant 2)

Owner I want you to go back to my vineyard and bring me my share of the fruit – and don't stand for any nonsense!
Servant 2 Yes, master. No, master.

(This servant approaches vineyard and stands outside.)

Servant 2 Open up! I come in my master's name. He demands his share of the fruit.
Tenant 2 It's not ready, but we are ready for you!

(They throw stones at this servant, and hurt his head.)

(Tenants re-enter vineyard, leaving servant lying, he picks himself up, and returns to owner, holding his head.)

Servant 2 I'm sorry master, but I didn't even get into the vineyard. They had stones all ready to throw at me.
Owner This is ridiculous. (Servant 3 enters) Here, you go to my vineyard, and bring what is owed to me.

(Servant 3 sets off)

Tenant 1 (Looking from watchtower) Here comes another one. Let's get rid of him.
Tenant 2 Maybe if we kill him, the owner will give up and leave us in peace.

(They attack servant, and drag him off stage – “dead”)
Owner  (To son) Son, I have a job for you. I am at my wits end. I have sent servant after servant to the vineyard. Some have come back beaten up, and some have never come back. You’re my son. The vineyard will be yours. You go and collect what they owe me. They will surely have respect for you.

Son  Alright, Father.

(Tenants see son approaching)

Tenant 2  There’s someone coming. It can’t be another servant. He is too richly dressed.

Tenant 1  Let me see – It looks like the owner himself! No, it can’t be. He’s too young! I bet it’s his son.

Tenant 2  His son! If we kill him, the vineyard will be ours. It’s a great vineyard – well worth having.

(They go to greet the son)

Tenant 1  Come in, come in – glad to see you.

(Tenant 2 hits him with a knife and drags him off)

(All are now off stage except Mother and son)

John  Mum, that’s dreadful. Those men were so wicked. Surely they weren’t allowed to get off with that?

Mother  No, John. The owner would be sure to come with a whole army of men, and put them to death for killing his son. He would then give the vineyard to honest tenants to look after.

John  Why did Jesus tell that story?

Mother  Jesus was reminding the people that God had sent them prophet after prophet to tell them about their sin. Now God had sent his Son – Jesus – but they would kill him.

John  Did that not make them sorry?

Mother  No, it made them all the more determined to get rid of Jesus. The sad thing is that, even today, lots of people do not want anything to do with Jesus, even though He died to save them from their sin.