

The Tenants Sermon October 3rd, 4th Mark Knauss Final Draft

I want to share with you a modern-day parable. John went to college and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering. He was excited to get a job as an engineer at the local automobile plant **[SLIDE – pic of an automobile factory]**. He now had a professional title with a paycheck covering his rent, car payment, and utility bills with some leftover. **[SLIDE – pic of new car]**. He got a nice apartment in a trendy part of town with young up and comers like him.

[Slide – pic of a nice apartment]

His new career proved to be not as fun as spending the money he was earning. He found himself the youngest member in a group of seasoned engineers. The next newest engineer had been there for five years. John found himself asking questions about everything. **[SLIDE – pic of young guy asking older worker a question]**. Not only did he have to ask how to find his way around the sprawling automotive manufacturing plant, but he also didn't know how to navigate the computer system or how to fill out his payroll sheet. When it came to engineering, he was even more lost. Automotive manufacturing was a whole new world for him, as was the culture of this particular factory. Every day he looked and acted like the newest and youngest member of the team. John felt vulnerable. **[SLIDE – pic of John anxious]**

To make matters worse, the other engineers at the factory did not make life easy for him. On his first day, John never forgets when he asked the senior project manager an engineering question. The response he received was less than cordial. "Don't you know that?" **[SLIDE – pic of someone being condescending]** snarked the seasoned employee. Other engineers followed suit. They answered John's questions with responses like, "You must have been asleep that day in calculus class," and "How long do I need to keep doing your work?"

After six weeks on the job, John received his first performance review. His boss was not flattering. **[SLIDE – pic of boss]** “John,” he said, “We expected you to be farther along at this point of your employment here with us.” John was flustered. The constant put-downs by his colleagues had made him withdrawn. He had reduced his communication with other team members to only that of necessity, which had slowed his learning progress. He was ‘out of the loop’ as they say, and it showed in his work. He came to meetings unprepared because he was unaware of expectations. The projects he completed were rampant with flaws because he didn’t have the knowledge base that the other seasoned engineers had.

After his performance review, the boss connected John with another engineer, Tom. **[SLIDE- pic of Tom]**. The boss told him that Tom had experience and patience. John had only interacted with Tom on a limited basis. Tom did not have much to say at the weekly meetings. He was quiet, and spent most of his day at his desk. Tom avoided the lunch room gatherings of most of the other engineers. He was not a schmoozer and had no interest in becoming a manager. He liked to come to work, do a good job, and go home. Tom had been with the company for over 30 years.

John met with Tom and quickly realized that Tom was approachable, not judgmental, and even had a sense of humor. **[SLIDE – pic of the two of them getting along at work]**. The two quickly hit it off, and John’s college education began to merge with his on the job training with Tom. Soon, John’s quality of work showed a marked improvement. John became a contender.

In our Bible parable today, we have these tenants who are responsible for managing a vineyard. **[SLIDE – pic of Tenants in the vineyard]**. When the landowner sends the slaves to

collect his produce, the tenants mistreated them and beat them up. The landowner sends his son thinking they will respect him, but the exact opposite occurs, and they take his life.

The tenants are like the engineers **[SLIDE – pic of tenants on one side and adult male workers on other side]** who made life difficult for John in our story today. They are both comfortable with their position in life and do not want to give anything up. The engineers do not want to share their knowledge and they are killing the spirit of their new employee. They have little care or regard for John.

Similarly, the tenants are unwilling to share anything with the master of the vineyard. They see those who come to collect what is owed the master of the vineyard as a threat. They kill the landowner's son. The tenants have little regard for human life.

The seasoned engineers and tenants are comfortable. Those who come and want something from them is viewed as a threat. One of the things Jesus is telling us in this story is that the gospel afflicts the comfortable.

Tom is the engineer in our story who makes a connection with John. **[SLIDE - PIC of Tom again]**. John is in a vulnerable and uncomfortable place. He feels that his future career and success are threatened. Tom comes alongside John and creates a safe learning environment. Because of Tom, John is now comfortable in his role. The gospel comforts the afflicted.

[SLIDE - Who are the tenants now? We are!] We all live in spaces that grant us some degree of authority and power. We have power in our occupations, homes, families, and friendships. Even if we feel powerless in these spaces, we have the power to let the master of the vineyard rule our hearts. We have the power to let God's spirit rule our hearts.

I imagine this story about John resonated with some of you because these scenarios play out in varying forms throughout our culture. **[SLIDE – aerial view of a city]**. In such a story, I imagine that most of the automotive plant workers did not think Tom had much power. He was a quiet guy who just came in and did his job. He was not a manager and did not spend his energies trying to gain acceptance from his coworkers. To John, Tom was all-powerful because he saved his career. Have you ever met someone like that? Someone who may have been off the beaten track, not part of the 'in-crowd' but a lifesaver to you? They valued you as a person. They did not kill your spirit of hope. You felt comfortable just being in their presence. **[SLIDE – picture of Jesus]**. Could God have been coming to you through that person?

God created us to be in relationship with each other. **[SLIDE – pic of people together]**. We are meant to be interdependent and connected to each other. For example, Adam wasn't left alone in the Garden of Eden. Or when Moses told God that he didn't think he could tackle Pharaoh alone, God sent Moses' brother Aaron with him. We are not to be tenants, sitting alone in the field God has given us.

When we think we are alone, then we run the risk of becoming tenants who sit by ourselves in our fields, ready to strike someone down when we feel threatened. God's kingdom is not like that. We are meant to be connected to each other because in our relationships is where God is at work.

In moments when we think that we have done it all on our own, we need to take a closer look at relationships that have helped and nurtured us to be where we are today. Pay attention to how God comes to us through other people – and give God thanks. Then we pay it

forward and to let God work through us – knowing that God calls us to be in relationship with each other.

I wanted to write an ending to my parable about John, the engineer. I wanted to write how John, some 30 years later, finds himself in the presence of a new, young engineer. At first, John feels threatened, but then quickly brushes that aside and takes the new employee under his wing. Instead, I want to leave it more open-ended and set in your laps. **[SLIDE - You and I are the tenants]** – right here, right now, and God comes to us.

We all have had moments when we reject the messenger God sends. We respond with, "Not now God, I am busy working, going to school, raising kids, relaxing." **[SLIDE – of a busy female adult]**. Then God pushes the envelope and sends Jesus. The world rejects him in a dramatic, harsh, and brutal way– on a cross. **[SLIDE – of an empty cross]** God brings Christ through death, and Jesus comes to us again: through the neighbor, **[SLIDE – pic of people]** through the stranger, at work, in the streets, at the borders, sometimes suffering and alone, or in the most unlikely of places and opportunities, like the new employee at our job. As tenants in this life, what will our response be?