"There is a temptation to make our holy books, even our privileged 'New' Testament readings, into a collection of quaint bygone accounts, comfortably shelved in a mausoleum. Now and then, we prod the dead text, safely kept at arm's length, with some thin academic stick that protects us from what we poke" (Kavanaugh, The Word Embodied, 110). What if the word is meant for us? What if the word is alive?

"When Jesus looks at scripture" [such as, the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah today], he does not fall into that temptation. "He recalls Isaiah's parable ... only to engage his own time and people. The leaders of his age were rejecting him, son of the vineyard's Lord, just as they rejected the delegations of prophets before him. What is worse, they reject him as the Son of God, even kill him, in the false hope that they will then get the inheritance for themselves" (110).

As we listen to the two versions of the parable of the vineyard, do we fall into the temptation, saying "that was then, this is now; this parable does not apply to me, to us"?

So, how is Isaiah's parable and Jesus' reformulation of it, a living word, a challenging message for us today, an invitation to life?

"Those who warn us that we neglect the ways of justice and close our ears to the cries of the poor are simply reminding us of the very gospel [the good news] we proclaim. Those who wonder whether we stewards of the gospel are actually living as if the gospels didn't exist are not posing the question from a 'worldly' perspective. They are posing it because they have received the seed of God's word and long to bear its fruit" (111).

"The wrong idea has taken root in the world. And the idea is this" there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives" (Boyle, Tattoos on the Heart, 212).
"Isaiah promised that there would remain with God's people, despite many infidelities, a 'holy remnant' of faithful followers who carry the truth, cherish the message, and steadfastly tend the vineyard" (Kavanaugh 110-111). Jesus repeatedly invites us to hear; to remain in his word, to be transformed by his word. Now here's the hard part: If we do not similarly apply the parable to ourselves, if we presume that we ourselves are most vulnerable to rejecting Christ in our own lives at times, then we ignore the gospel we proclaim.

It is a paradox: If we absolve ourselves and do not apply the word to ourselves, we are no better than the tenants who abuse the vineyard and the Lord of the vineyard. If, however, we listen and hear the cries of the poor and the marginalized, those left behind, those who scare us, then the word takes root and we have life. We live in a precarious, if deeply privileged time. There are those among us who help; those who steadfastly tend the vineyard - that is, the human community.

- Sister Stan Terese Mumuni who serves abandoned and special needs children and mothers in God's Children Orphanage in Ghana;
- Drs. Jason Reinking and Noha Aboelata who bring medical care to the homeless in Oakland, through the Roots Clinic; and
- Sister Marilyn Lacey, who in South Sudan and Haiti brings the care of God through Mercy Beyond Borders.

Such people aspire to no human greatness, fabulous wealth, rank, or privilege. Like so many among us, they act as salt; they are leaven; they are the hands that tend the vineyard.