

October 26, 2014  
Pentecost 20

*"A Song about a Vineyard"*

---

### **ISAIAH 5:1-7**

---

*I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. <sup>2</sup> He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. <sup>3</sup> "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup> What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? <sup>5</sup> Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. <sup>6</sup> I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." <sup>7</sup> The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.*

It's a song, quite an amazing song, a song about a vineyard. The person who sings the song is the prophet Isaiah. He sings about the Lord's love for his vineyard. The vineyard is the nation of Israel. The vineyard is you and the vineyard is me.

Songs are important to us. People sing when they are sad. They sing when they are happy. They sing about their love for each other, their love for their country and their love for God. When we gather for worship as we are doing here this morning, we sing about God's amazing love for us. Music and poetry combine to bring God's grace and mercy deep into our hearts and lives. We sit at the side of those who are dying in the arms of Jesus and comfort them with singing.

Let's listen to this song about God's love for us and then listen also for God's concern for us.

#### **A song that sings of great love for us**

The prophet Isaiah says, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard." Here is the song. "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside." Isaiah sings of the Lord God whom he loves as someone who had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. When I looked at these words in the original Hebrew at first they seemed to make no sense. The Hebrew literally says "a horn with a source of oil." Then upon further examination you realize how beautiful this description is of a vineyard. The vineyard is like a horn or outcropping of rock. It is filled with fertile soil that can produce olive trees and olives dripping with oil. If ever there was a place to create a vineyard and plant a choice vine, it was on this outcropping of the rock, with rich soil, water flowing over the limestone hills and finding its way into the subsoil. The Lord chose the nation of Israel to be his special vineyard.

Isaiah sings more about the Lord and his vineyard. "He dug it up and cleared the stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press." The field was cleared of rocks. A wall was built around it to protect it and there was even a tower that could be used to watch over the vineyard as the grapes began to ripen. No animals or thieves would get into that vineyard and steal the succulent bunches of grapes. The choicest vines were chosen to be planted into the vineyard, perfectly paired for climate and soil to produce the highest quality and quantity of grapes. He built a winepress in eager anticipation of the bumper crop of grapes. He cut and chiseled it out of the solid rock to efficiently get the most juice from the grapes.

Listen to Isaiah as he sings this song of the vineyard in the streets of Jerusalem. He sings to help these people realize they were the vineyard of the Lord, rich with blessings. If ever there was a nation on earth that had its horn filled with the riches of God's grace and mercy it was the Old Testament Jewish people. Paul writes in Romans 11, "Theirs is the adoption of sons, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." God called Abraham and told him, "I am going to make you the father of a great nation." Israel was a great nation because the Lord blessed it with material prosperity in a land flowing with milk and honey. He gave them the promises of the Messiah who was to come from one of their descendants. He gave them prophets who spoke to them about the future Messiah in clear words that any child could understand. He gave them temple worship with animals sacrificed at the altars to picture the blood of Jesus that would be shed for sin. He gave them music, singing unlike any nation of people on earth, the famous songs of Zion. When people gathered in the temple by the thousands, and lifted their voices in worship to the Lord, it made you tremble with joy. How could you not feel goose bumps when you gathered together and sang your hallmark song of joy from Psalm 118, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever."

When we think of this specially chosen vineyard we think of the blessings that have come into our lives. The Lord your God chose you to be his beloved vineyard. He chose you to be attached to Jesus the vine even though you don't deserve it. Ephesians chapter one says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." The Lord your God has richly blessed you with his Word filling your life with his promises that never fail, thousands of promises in this book we call the Bible. You have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is hard not to burst out in singing with the psalmist, "Praise the Lord O my soul, all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." How eagerly the Lord anticipates you producing fruits of faith out of love for him. Ephesians 2 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." We are God's vineyard.

### **A song that sings of great concern for us**

This song from the vineyard now goes from singing about love and mercy to singing about a deep concern. It says in our text, "Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit." The word used here in the Hebrew is used in other places of the Old Testament to describe something stinky and rotten.

How bad was the fruit that God's people produced in their lives? Remember the people who left the land of Egypt, walked through the waters of the Red Sea, and ate manna from heaven, and drank water that miraculously flowed from the rocks. When it came time to enter the Promised Land, they rebelled against God, rejected him, and a whole generation rebelled against God. After the new generation went into the Promised Land, it took only one generation to reject the Lord and go after Baal worship. At the time these words of Isaiah were written, people in Jerusalem would worship the Lord in the temple in the morning and worship Baal up in the groves at night in the orgiastic rituals that were part of that cultic worship. When Jesus came, the beloved Messiah, the seed of Abraham who would bless all nations, these people refused to believe he was the Messiah.

What does the Lord say about a vineyard that stubbornly refused to produce good fruit? "I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The Lord did that with Israel. He withdrew the rains that came across the hills from the Mediterranean Sea. He took down the protective shield that kept the enemies from overrunning the land. He sent his people into captivity in the land of Babylon. God kept the covenant that was made with Israel to bless them if they carried out his plans for him and curse them for turning their back on him.

Have you ever noticed how the gospel is no longer flourishing in lands where it was once found in such rich abundance? Take England for example. Great cathedrals and beautiful churches are found throughout London and England. A survey in 2012 revealed that only 800,000 people attend worship in England on any given Sunday. Germany, the land of the Reformation is not much better. The great cathedrals are museums more than houses of worship. The Lord looks for good grapes as a fruit of the message of the gospel and there is only bad grapes, rotten grapes, stinky grapes.

The Lord our God is concerned, deeply concerned, about the fruit we are producing in our lives as branches connected to Jesus the true Vine. Not all the grapes produced in your life this past week have been good grapes. Some have been stinky and rotten. Paul saw some of those stinky grapes in his life when he wrote in Romans 7, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing." We can thrust a finger into the air and point at the nation of Israel for trying to worship Baal and other gods alongside the Lord God Almighty. But always at the point at which we condemn others we see similar stinky grapes in our lives as well. So many things, so many things occupy our thoughts, our worries, our concerns and even our passions more than the Lord our God.

The Lord our God is concerned about the fruit that is being produced in your life and mine. He is so concerned that he uses portions of Scripture such as this to help us examine our hearts and minds to see our need of help from Jesus. Isaiah sings, "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." The Hebrew words used here a word play. In Hebrew God looked for mishpat (justice) but found only mispach (bloodshed), he looked for zedekah (righteousness) but found only zaakah (cries of distress). When the Lord looks at my heart and yours he is deeply concerned about the sinful thoughts and actions that we overlook, tolerate and

even justify.

I thought this was a love song. Here the Lord is calling me to repentance. He is calling me to examine my own life and my own heart. He wants me to see what is wrong in my life and where I have failed and fallen short of his glory. He wants me to see what is wrong with my heart so I can come to him for the forgiveness that can only be found in Jesus. That is deepest love. Here is the song the Lord wants me to sing: Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me, Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am his and he is mine!

You are the Lord's vineyard. You are attached to Christ the true Vine. You are the branches that bear fruit that is clean through the blood of Jesus that is shed for you. Today, and tomorrow, and throughout your life you are privileged to bear fruit and give glory to your Lord. Amen.