

ISAIAH 5:1-7 SAVED FRUIT

It's harvest time, but there's no harvest to be brought in, nothing to be thankful for next week, as far as your crop is concerned. Sure, it did grow something, but that something was wild and bad. You couldn't eat it, or even sell it for animal feed. What a terrible love song this turns out to be.

Isaiah sings a love song for God's vineyard, His people, for us. Everything was set up perfectly for the people of God. This could be speaking of the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, or the people of Israel coming into the Promised Land, or us at various points in our lives. God set up this garden, this beautiful vineyard, this life, in the most perfect way. God looked for great things to come from His people, but only bad things came from them. What a disappointment. What a letdown.

How would you feel if all your plans for something good failed, and only bad results came? You failed at school. You failed at your job. You failed in your marriage. Your children don't talk to you. They don't worship God, and your grandchildren don't even know you. How would you react?

God reacts in what seems like a temper tantrum. Sure, the crop failed and what else can you do but plow it under and try again. God did that with the global flood. He wiped the earth clean of almost everything and started over again with just eight people. Yet He did say that He would never wipe the earth clean with a flood again, and yet here we have a similar pronouncement from Isaiah.

O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, O people of Mitchell and Grace Lutheran Church, what more was there for God to do for you? What hasn't God done for you? When God looks for goodness from us, why does He find badness?

God's response in this parable is to destroy the vineyard. He's quite explicit in His destruction. He doesn't just plow it under, but rather He curses it as He cursed the original creation of the garden of Eden with thorns and thistles. Here in Isaiah it plays out again, and again in our Gospel reading from Matthew, and again in our lives as God removes His goodness from those who don't want His goodness.

Do you like this parable? Some do. Some don't. Some rejoice to see evil doers punished. Others object when they realize that they or their loved ones are among those evil doers. We get two very different responses to the retelling of this parable in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Listen to these two and think about which one you prefer.

Jesus asked, ““When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to Him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”” – Matthew 21:40-41. Again Jesus asked in the Gospel of Luke, ““What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!”” (20:15-16). Which ending do you like? Do you respond to Isaiah’s parable and say along with our Gospel reading from Matthew, “Put those wretches to a miserable death!”? Or do you reflect that you might be one of those bad grapes, and respond to God’s destruction of the vineyard with a loud, “Surely Not!”?

We have both at the end of our reading from Isaiah. There’s bloodshed, and there’s an outcry of distress. Are you the one shedding blood, doing bad, or are you the one to whom bad is being inflicted upon, and you cry out to the Lord in distress?

How you look at a parable like this depends upon who you are. Is God coming to destroy you because of the bad things that you do, or is God coming to rescue you from the bad things that are being done to you? Only you know where you fall when we look at such a parable of judgment. These parables are hard to read and even harder to preach on. Often times we don’t like to hear about God’s wrath on evil doers, even if we’re not one of them. Such parables reinforce a negative image of the church or God. “Watch out, God is coming to get you”, might be the only message that some people leave with.

This might be all that you see. Your life does feel like the hedge has been removed and goats are devouring what goodness you see before it has a chance to grow, and what they don’t eat is trampled by cows. And then comes the wasteland of thorns and no rain, no blessings from God. You might lament and ask why there’s no justice, no righteousness in this world, but only bloodshed, fighting, and quarreling, stealing and abuse and a complete waste of resources. I know I weary of turning on the news. I don’t want to hear it day after day.

Is God just a demanding, punitive God waiting to punish us? Has He abandoned us to the evils of this world? Where is the Gospel in this reading? It’s not here. You have to look elsewhere to find it. It comes in a part two section, or three, like a trilogy. You have to listen to Jesus and what God really does with vines that don’t produce good grapes.

In the Gospel of John Jesus said, ““I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in

the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love” (15:1-9).

Yes, some of the branches of the vine around us will be destroyed, they will end up in hell. And sometimes in life it will feel like bad things are being done to us as God prunes us so that we may live better lives, but in the end we’ll feel better about it. At times you’ll need to cry out to God in your distress, and here Jesus promises that God will answer you in your time of need. He will make us into a garden of His delight, secure in His righteousness.

Now you might ask, as so many have asked God before you in the Bible, “How will these things be?”. Where does the good fruit come from in your lives? Now for part three of our Trilogy.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-24).

Here lies the answer to our dilemma as Christians as we look out upon the wild vineyard of this world and all the bloodshed that we see. When we cry out to God in our distress He has an answer for us – the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. Jesus took upon Himself all the badness of this wild vineyard. He was abandoned by God upon the cross for us. He suffered the crown of thorns from hell for us in that land of no rain. He paid our penalty for our sin to appease the wrath of God Almighty.

That all sounds great but still you might wonder how you benefit from all that. How is what Jesus did applied to you? How do you receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit? It’s simple. You receive it all in Holy Baptism. In Holy Baptism you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and you’re joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection for your eternal salvation (Romans 6:3-5).

Think back to the flood that washed away almost an entire sinful world, a flood that God said that He would never bring about again on this earth, and yet He did reenact it in a way. We see the foreshadowing of it in God’s act of destroying this vineyard, but we experience it’s full effects in our baptisms. Peter tells us in his first letter that, “**Baptism**, which corresponds to [the flood], now **saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God

for a good conscience, **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**" (1 Peter 3:20-21). Baptism saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.