

16th Sunday after Pentecost
 September 16, 2012
 Isaiah 5:1-7

In Christ Jesus, our loving Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How many love songs have been written over the annals of time? Many of them are sad love songs. Sometimes those are the best love songs as one line in a popular song says, "Because the best love songs are written with a broken heart." Sad love songs touch the heart and sometimes even brings tears to the eyes. Well this morning the prophet Isaiah sings for us a love song, a beautiful, joyful, love song for his beloved, the LORD, but it is also a sad love song because of the ending. So this morning let's

LISTEN TO ISAIAH'S LOVE SONG

I: IT IS A JOYFUL SONG OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US SINNERS

II: IT IS A SAD SONG OF US SINNER'S LOVE FOR GOD

Isaiah uses a vivid picture in our text that appeals to the imagination of his hearers. Fertile vineyards dotted the countryside of Israel. Isaiah turns these vineyards into a parable, in the same way Jesus would do, into a spiritual lesson. Isaiah is not the only one to compare God's people to a vineyard planted by God. The prophet Asaph in Ps. 80 speaks of God planting His vineyard and it being laid waste because it was unfruitful. Asaph then prays for God to revive the vineyard and give life again to the vines so that they produce fruit. The LORD in Jeremiah 2 declares, **YET I PLANTED YOU A NOBLE VINE, A SEED OF HIGHEST QUALITY. HOW THEN HAVE YOU TURNED BEFORE ME INTO THE DEGENERATE PLANT OF AN ALIEN VINE?** Jesus also uses this picture of the vines and vineyard at least twice in His preaching to the people.

Isaiah identifies the vineyard in verse 7 as **THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND THE MEN OF JUDAH**, God's chosen people. This parable also applies to us today, because we are New Testament Israel, God's vineyard, His chosen generation, His unique, special people, the elect of God.

This vineyard belongs to God and it sits **ON A VERY FRUITFUL HILL**. God had showered upon His people some great blessings. In verse 2, Isaiah sings of some of the many things God did for His vineyard, His chosen people. We read again, **HE DUG IT UP AND CLEARED OUT ITS STONES, AND PLANTED IT WITH THE CHOICEST VINE. HE BUILT A TOWER IN ITS MIDST, AND ALSO MADE A WINEPRESS IN IT. SO HE EXPECTED IT TO BRING FORTH GOOD GRAPES...**

God did all of this, the digging up of the ground, the clearing of stones, the planting of the choicest vines, the building of a watchtower and the making of a winepress in anticipation of the grapes that would grow.

All of these actions are pictures of God's grace upon the people. The vineyard, the people did nothing, it receives the action of the Lord. He did the work, they received the benefit. God left nothing out. What loving, tender care He gave to His people. He called them out of Egypt and miraculously fed them as they journeyed in the wilderness. He cleared out the land of Canaan for them to live in, by conquering one heathen nation after another. He planted them in the midst of His prophetic Word and gave them sacrifices which pointed them to their Savior, the Messiah where they received the best nourishment to be choice vines. He built a watchtower by raising up kings to protect them physically and raising up prophets who warned them of the enemy--the idolatry and immorality of their surrounding neighbors and of their own sinful flesh's desire to follow after the things of this world. He called them back to repentance over and over again. He even built a hedge around this vineyard of Israel with His laws and regulations to keep them separate from the rest of the world.

Then He looked for a good crop. Isaiah sings, **SO HE EXPECTED IT TO BRING FORTH GOOD GRAPES, BUT IT BROUGHT FORTH WILD GRAPES**. After all of His hard work, after all of His love and devotion, the vineyard produced nothing but wild, sour tasting, inedible grapes, which were good for nothing. Isaiah's sad song comes to an end.

Now the Owner of the vineyard, God Himself, speaks: **AND NOW, O INHABITANTS OF**

JERUSALEM AND MEN OF JUDAH, JUDGE, PLEASE, BETWEEN ME AND MY VINEYARD. WHAT MORE COULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO MY VINEYARD THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHY THEN, WHEN I EXPECTED IT TO BRING FORTH GOOD GRAPES, DID IT BRING FORTH WILD GRAPES?

God calls the very people He is accusing to act as judge and jury in this case. What do you think, God asks? The prophet Nathan did the same thing when he asked David to judge the actions of the man who took the one little lamb of his neighbors and killed it rather than use one of his many, many lambs. David judged the case and said, **AS THE LORD LIVES, THE MAN WHO HAS DONE THIS SHALL SURELY DIE!**

When David was told he was the man, he admitted to his guilt, repented of his sin and sought the Lord's forgiveness. David wrote in Ps. 51: 1-4 **HAVE MERCY UPON ME, O GOD, ACCORDING TO YOUR LOVING KINDNESS; ACCORDING TO THE MULTITUDE OF YOUR TENDER MERCIES. BLOT OUT MY TRANSGRESSIONS. WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MY INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN. FOR I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME. AGAINST YOU, YOU ONLY HAVE I SINNED, AND DONE THIS EVIL IN YOUR SIGHT-- THAT YOU MAY BE FOUND JUST WHEN YOU SPEAK, AND BLAMELESS WHEN YOU JUDGE.** Another Psalmist wrote in Ps. 130:3-4 **IF YOU, LORD, SHOULD MARK INIQUITIES, O LORD, WHO COULD STAND? BUT THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH YOU, THAT YOU MAY BE FEARED.**

No human being can stand before God justified, holy, righteous on his own. Thanks to the redeeming, justifying work of Jesus on the cross, we are able to stand before God on Judgment Day fully forgiven and righteous in Christ through faith in what Jesus has done for us.

So what is the judgment, the verdict of the people? What more could God have done for them? The only answer can be: **NOTHING!** Why did they not yield good fruit? Because there was no faith.

The tone of the next verses changes dramatically. This time God is the Judge ready to pronounce His judgment on the case. The evidence was presented. It was clear and convincing. The people fully deserved what was coming to them. They have no one but themselves to blame. So God announces the judgment, the punishment: **AND NOW, PLEASE LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I WILL DO TO MY VINEYARD; I WILL TAKE AWAY ITS HEDGE, AND IT SHALL BE BURNED; AND BREAK DOWN ITS WALL, AND IT SHALL BE TRAMPLED DOWN. I WILL LAY IT WASTE; IT SHALL NOT BE PRUNED OR DUG, BUT THERE SHALL COME UP BRIERS AND THORNS. I WILL ALSO COMMAND THE CLOUDS THAT THEY RAIN NO RAIN ON IT.**

No longer would God protect His people from their enemy nations around them, the hedge would be removed. The wall of protection would be torn down. This literally happened when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and tore down the city walls and destroyed the temple of Solomon so that not one stone lay on top of another.

The briars and thorns, their sinfulness, rebellion, and wickedness choked out the life of the vines and they died spiritually. The lack of rain seems to mean a lack of the Word watering the hearts of the people. The prophet Amos, whom we heard from last week, predicted that in his book chapter 8:11-12 **BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD GOD, THAT I WILL SEND A FAMINE ON THE LAND, NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD, NOR A THIRST FOR WATER, BUT OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD. THEY SHALL WANDER FROM SEA TO SEA, AND FROM NORTH TO EAST; THEY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, SEEKING THE WORD OF THE LORD, BUT SHALL NOT FIND IT.**

Finally the Lord declares in verse 7: **FOR THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD OF HOSTS IS THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL, AND THE MEN OF JUDAH ARE HIS PLEASANT PLANT. HE LOOKED FOR JUSTICE, BUT BEHOLD OPPRESSION; FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT BEHOLD, WEeping.**

Isaiah closes out this section with a play on words. The Hebrew word for **JUSTICE** is very similar to the Hebrew word for **OPPRESSION**. Like the words sad/glad. They are similar in letters and sound, but direct opposites in meaning. The Hebrew word for **RIGHTEOUSNESS** is very

similar to the Hebrew word for **WEEPING/DISTRESS**.

Perhaps you are already way ahead of me in applying these important words and this sad love song to your own individual life. We are God's vineyard today. He has planted us into His Word. Through faith in Jesus we grow and produce fruit. In fact Jesus tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches and He expects fruit to come from us. The Lord has done everything for us. He chose us to be His vineyards. He has planted us with loving care. He has dug around us, fertilized us with His Word so that we will bring forth the fruit of good works. He daily protects us as a wall surrounding us and His watchtower of His pastors and teachers call out to us everyday. It is by His unmerited grace through Christ that we have been saved and are now part of His vineyard. As Isaiah says, we **ARE HIS PLEASANT PLANT**, or as another translation has it, we **ARE THE GARDEN OF HIS DELIGHT**. We are told by Paul, **YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN; FOR YOU WERE BOUGHT AT A PRICE; THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY AND IN YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH ARE GOD'S**.

The price God paid to own us was the lifeblood of His Son, our Savior Jesus. Our God has made a huge investment in us and He expects fruit in return. He calls us to be faithful in our words and actions. He expects to see fruit in our lives as we live for others and serve others. He searches our hearts daily to see if we are growing well in His Word and to see if we are the good grapes and not the wild grapes. What is He looking for specifically?

- 1) Obedience to His Word: as children to your parents, as workers to our bosses, as students to your teachers.
- 2) Love and respect, service and commitment as husband and wife to each other. A commitment of time, talents and treasures as members of a Christian congregation: helping teach Sunday School; being a Voting member and holding an office; giving generously of our offerings for His Kingdom work; telling others about His great love; singing in the choir; regularly hearing His Word; consistently partaking of His Supper; attending Bible Class; helping with the maintenance and cleaning of the church and property; praying for our fellow church members and our teacher, our Sunday School teachers and for myself as pastor.
- 3) He is looking for us to be lights to the world so that when they see our good works He will receive the glory and praise.

The historic example of the destruction of Israel is a clear lesson for all of us. The judgment of God that came upon them was swift and complete. The judgment that will befall this earth and all of the people on it will be the same.

Isaiah's love song joyfully shows God's great love for us but also sadly shows our miserable weak love and sometimes even lack of love for God. But it is not the fear of judgment that will motivate us to bring forth fruit in our lives, but the love of our God that He has poured into us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The same Savior who said to us that without Him, the Vine, we, the branches, can do nothing also says to us: **HE WHO ABIDES IN ME, AND I IN HIM, BEARS MUCH FRUIT;...BY THIS MY FATHER IS GLORIFIED, THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT; SO YOU WILL BE MY DISCIPLES**.

The message of our Savior's great love for us, of His loving sacrifice for us, that will motivate us to want to and to be able to willingly sacrifice ourselves in service to Him and to our fellow human beings.

Almighty Father, bless the Word which thro' Thy grace we now have heard. Oh, may the precious seed take root, spring up and bear abundant fruit!

Amen.

