

## **Isaiah 5:1-7**

<sup>1</sup>Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. <sup>2</sup>He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

<sup>3</sup>And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup>What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

<sup>5</sup>And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. <sup>6</sup>I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

<sup>7</sup>For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

## **Luke 12:49-56**

<sup>49</sup>"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! <sup>51</sup>Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! <sup>52</sup>From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; <sup>53</sup>they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

<sup>54</sup>He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. <sup>55</sup>And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. <sup>56</sup>You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

## **A Storm is Coming August 14, 2016**

In the musical *The Fantasticks*\* there are two fathers, one with a son and the other with a daughter. They are both a bit bewildered by their efforts to get their respective children to do what they want them to do, which is fall in love. And they sing this sweet and funny little song together as they compare raising children to growing vegetables.

*Plant a radish. Get a radish. Never any doubt.  
That's why I love vegetables; You know what you're about!  
Plant a turnip. Get a turnip. Maybe you'll get two.  
That's why I love vegetables; You know that they'll come through!*

*They're dependable! They're befrienable! They're the best pal a parent's ever known!  
While with children, It's bewilderin'. You don't know until the seed is nearly grown  
Just what you've sown.*

*So, Plant a carrot, Get a carrot, Not a Brussels sprout.  
That's why I love vegetables. You know what you're about!*

*Life is merry, If it's very Vegetarian!  
A man who plants a garden Is a very happy man!*

*Plant a beanstalk. Get a beanstalk. Just the same as Jack.  
Then if you don't like it, You can always take it back!  
But if your issue Doesn't kiss you, Then I wish you luck.  
For once you've planted children, You're absolutely stuck!*

*Every turnip green! Every kidney bean!  
Every plant grows according to the plot!  
While with progeny, It's hodge-podge.  
For as soon as you think you know what kind you've got,  
It's what they're not!*

*So, Plant a cabbage. Get a cabbage. Not a sauerkraut!  
That's why I love vegetables. You know what you're about!  
Life is merry If it's very Vegetarian.  
A man who plants a garden  
Is a very happy man!*

I share this somewhat humorous song to not only make the point that what we plant doesn't always come out the way we think it will, but to also bring a bit of levity to a couple of very challenging texts this morning which also speak to things that are planted and how we fall short of God's expectations.

Both Isaiah and Jesus are expressing a similar theme which we read in the bible over and over again and that is, that God has blessed us with all the things we could possibly need. And the expectation is that as a nation, the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, they will be a blessing to all nations and all peoples.

The one constant idea throughout the old testament is that Abraham and his people were 'blessed to be a blessing.' When God's people decide to look the other way when the poor are being oppressed or injustice is being executed on the voiceless and helpless, then guess what? A storm is coming! Walls will be broken down. Briars will take over what once was a blessing and everyone will suffer. This is judgement. This is a storm, and even Jesus wonders why those who are with him can't connect the dots and see that.

And it is prophetic language like this that causes division not only among the ancient people of Israel but for 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians as well. The very act of following Jesus and being faithful to God's call to care for all creation will put you in some very conflicting situations. Just like it did for Jesus.

At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus stood in the little synagogue of his home town and proclaimed to all the people there that he had come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release for those held captive, to bring sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, not just for the Jews but for all people. Guess what? They dragged him out of there and tried to throw him off the cliff. Jesus has been upsetting people from the git go! And I thought it might be worth looking at some of the other things he said and did that might cause division at home.

Hang out and party with sinners. Sell all your possessions and follow him. Forgive your enemies (even those who stole all your money.) Love your neighbor (even if she is so different from you that you can't relate.) Put God first in your life. Don't kill anyone. Don't lust after anyone or anything. Share the bread and the wine.

Oppose the rule of law if it excludes or oppresses the poor and needy and voiceless. Challenge the religious status quo and demand that God's love and justice reign.

Who is Jesus talking too? If he is talking to the good Jewish people who have been following the Law and the religious authorities charged with enforcing that law... then heck yeah, you can bet there is going to be some division between those who hold to the correct beliefs and codes and laws, and those who will follow the Son of Love! And Jesus was clear about the law not being taken away, but rather a correct understanding of that law which he clearly lived by, which was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, mind, passion, energy, and resources, and love your neighbor as yourself. Bear fruit! Grapes of Blessings, to hold on to that vineyard motif. Care about the things that God cares about. Justice and Righteousness is what Isaiah cries out!

Open any newspaper or news broadcast and these very words could easily be the headlines for today! "They expected clean water, but got lead instead!" Where is the Justice? They expected to vote, but were turned away because they couldn't read or didn't have the correct ID. They expected to find food support but instead got a lecture about how lazy and irresponsible they were. They expected to get a warning for that broken taillight, but got thrown in jail until they could pay, or worse. "We expected Justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!"

There's a storm coming! Jesus tells us to open our eyes and see the signs of the times! There is a storm coming! Unless you stand for the oppressed. Unless you see those who are being excluded. Unless you stand in protest against those powers of the world and the nations that make policies and decisions that destroy the integrity of life for the weakest among us... there's a storm coming.

And yes, if you do this there will be division. If like Jesus, you stand before the powerful and proclaim God's favor for all people, they most likely will want to kill you for it. They certainly may do all in their power to keep you from it and divert your efforts. Even your Christian sisters and brothers may stand against you because they think they know God's will better than you.

But it really comes back to this. We are blessed to be a blessing. Not only as individuals, but as a nation, and as the body of Christ in this world. God has planted us as His pleasing vineyard in the world and the fruit of that vineyard is for all the world. And if we hold on to that just for ourselves...well, maybe you should read Isaiah one more time. "I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns." A storm is coming! And it is being fueled by our selfishness and apathy.

Jon Van De Laar in his commentary this week shared this. He said, "Every Christ-following community and individual is faced, daily, with a choice. We can choose to adopt an 'escapist' faith, ignoring the pain of the world while waiting for heavenly bliss after we die, or we can do the work of listening, watching and understanding our societies and neighborhoods, and the times in which we live.

We can prophecy what is easy, comfortable and expedient for us – what requires little sacrifice and work, what makes us feel good, but changes little – or we can draw attention to the signs of injustice among us, we can call out corruption and exploitation, and we can hold ourselves and our leaders accountable to care for the marginalized and vulnerable.

Ultimately, if we take the latter course, we will face the suffering of getting involved, for we will have to actually do something about the issues we expose. We will also, inevitably, face the aggression and threats of those who are invested in the status quo. We will find ourselves upsetting the peace, and being labelled "divisive", "rabble-rousers" and other names. The question is whether we have the conviction and courage to

follow the great cloud of witnesses in service of God's reign, or not. This is a choice we will face every single day."

I'm feeling a real need to sit and look at what God has planted in my heart and look and see if I've turned out the way he expected or if I've just become a wild or sour grape. These are hard words to take today and I can't tell you how much I wish I didn't have to stand up here and say them. Because they are words for me as well. I too have to think about and consider how my life has either encouraged or diminished God's love and blessings to those around me and in my own community, state, nation, world. I pray for courage for us all, as we step out in faith for those whom God loves, the whole creation. I want to leave you with a different song today. Lyrics by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, my favorite writer. It's called We Look to You, O Jesus and it goes like this.

### **We Look to You, O Jesus**

LANCASHIRE 7.6.7.6 D ("The Day of Resurrection")

We look to you, O Jesus — in faith, our Pioneer —  
For you have gone before us and brought your people here.  
You showed us all God's kingdom, you gave us work to do;  
In death you went before us; for life, we turn to you.

Through times of strife and anguish, through times of joy and grace,  
Through conflicts with our culture, you've brought us to this place;  
And still your world is changing, and still we seek to be  
A church reformed, reforming in faithful ministry.

Perfecter of the faith, Lord, we look to you each day;  
We work for peace and justice, we worship, learn and pray —  
And witnesses surround us, a host of saints above,  
As we continue sharing the joy of your great love.

Let us pray

It would be much easier, Jesus,  
to ignore the hard truths around us:  
the widening gap  
between rich and poor,  
the consistency with which the powerful  
get their way,  
the bending of rules and the self-enrichment  
of the connected and influential,  
the lack of adequate care, protection and resources  
for the most vulnerable among us;  
we would rather not see these signs.

It would be much easier if we could just pretend everything was alright,  
if we could prophesy goodness and light,  
and ignore the darkness and evil;  
if we didn't have to offend the status quo,  
or challenge the comfortable;  
if we could convince ourselves that the cross,  
was just a one time thing –

your calling, not ours.

But, we can't do this, Jesus, because we know too much;  
your Gospel has captured us and opened our eyes,  
and we have become slaves to love,  
the love that must speak for the voiceless,  
the love that must challenge injustice,  
the love that draws lines of division  
between truth and denial,  
between compassion and expediency.

Give us the courage to acknowledge what we see,  
to name the signs of the times,  
to disrupt the 'way things are'  
in the name of what should be,  
to divide in order to heal and restore,  
and to be crucified for the sake of love.

Written by John Van De Laar from Sacredise.com

\*The Fantasticks by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones, 1960