

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 5:1–7

Sermon: Life in the Vineyard

They say wine-making is easy. A winemaker or vintner can use flowers (marigolds and carnations), vegetables (carrots or potatoes), grains (wheat or barley), or fruits (grapes, cherries, so many others) to produce wine. As long as fruit flies and air space are eliminated, a fermented product can be tasted within a week or tucked away for a year or more.

Vine-making or growing the grapes on the other hand is quite hard. The grower is concerned not only with making wine but with making vines, which make grapes that can be made into wine. Starting a vineyard is not only expensive but time consuming and laborious.

The selection of a piece of ground is the first important step. Vineyards on Israel's topography were commonly planted on a side of a hill or mountain. Israel was fertile but rugged. Hillsides and mountainsides are naturally rocky. The stones must be removed, along with the other vegetation along with the weeds and thorns before digging, hoeing, terracing, and preparing the soil. Good drainage is a must.

Grape vines are selected. I don't know much about growing grapes but I've heard they often will slice different vines together to get the optimum vines, both for taste and for a hardy plant that is sturdy and durable. And the vineyard needs protection, protection from wild animals and rodents rats, wild boars, and foxes. And the domesticated intruders such as sheep, goats, or the common thief. Often a wall of stones or a hedge of thorns were used.

If a person is to be a vintner, he will have to spend time, energy, and money from the beginning of the process to the end. There's need for a vat, a winepress, wineskins, hired workers to work in the vineyard.

Isaiah sings the song of the vintner, the Well Beloved, the Beloved and his vineyard: ***"Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 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"*** (vs. 1–2b).

The Well Beloved has a vineyard. He chooses wisely the piece of ground. The winemaker had chosen the land and told his very first steward, Abram, ***"To your offspring I will give this land"*** (Gen 12:7). Those tenants of Abraham's seed came along many years later. They filled the land.

As Psalm 80 gives testimony, ***“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River”*** (Psalm 80:8–11).

When the tenants were about to be established as the vineyard of the Lord, God the landlord gave them a great sign a huge, single cluster of grapes so large it had to be carried on a pole by two men (Numbers 13)! The land was a gift to them.

The owner of the vineyard had a purpose. It was to establish Jerusalem so the promised inheritor of the vineyard could come there and gather the fruits. Jerusalem is the vineyard. The temple is built there, on the highest hill, a fertile hill.

Father Jacob's prophecy to his son Judah rings out. ***"Judah . . . binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes"*** (Genesis 49:11). The Gospel here is rich. If Isaiah were preaching to us today, he would say, ***"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price"*** (Isaiah 55:1).

What do Jacob and Judah and Isaiah have to offer us? Jesus! Jesus' coming. Jesus as the vine. Jesus proceeding into Jerusalem on the donkey. Jesus as his life is crushed out on the rock of Calvary. Jesus as his blood dripped down upon the rocks, like the juice of grapes being stomped in the winepress and into the wine vat below.

The Lord says, ***"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel"***

(Isaiah 63:3). There is no one who does good, no not one. ***"He looked for [his vineyard] to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"***

(vs. 2c-4).

God's chosen nation was a bad tenant. Israel. The Hebrews. The circumcised. She allowed the weeds of false doctrine to grow among the branches.

She permitted the wild boars of false teachers to eat the good grapes and root out the noble vine of God's planting. And when the landowner Lord sent his servants the prophets to collect fruits, the vinedressers of Israel beat, killed, and stoned them.

The owner undeterred because he loves his vineyard will send his son, his well-beloved son. Surely the tenants will respect and love his son. Not so. He, too, is killed.

Our Lord does not take hatred of his Well Beloved lightly. The Lord holds those who hate him in derision. He speaks to them in his wrath: ***"And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. . . . I will make it a waste"*** (vs. 5a, 6a). He tramples his people in his fury. He takes away the hedge. The Lord breaks down the wall. He stops the rain. This is not pretend anger or wrath on our Lord's part. It is real. He hates rebellion against his word.

This is not the sin of one group of people in a an ancient time and place. For all of us like sheep have gone astray. Each lamb has turned to his own way, thinking his way right and good and pleasing to God. Self-righteousness does not please God. Only his righteousness. Oppression does not please God, only his justice.

There is both life and death in the vineyard. Branches are pruned. That which does not bear fruit is cut away. After the first Lord's Supper, Judas leaves the company of the Twelve. He is cut away. The other eleven will bear fruit, as branches in the vine.

We are offshoots of the eleven. Fruit of the vine Jesus. We continue to bear fruit because we are clean in the waters of Holy Baptism. Our tongues, like Isaiah's tongue, sing the song of our Well Beloved. Our hunger and thirst for that crimson blood of Jesus shed for our sins.

The righteousness of which we once boasted, that of our flesh and of the Law, we now count as rubbish. We know Christ. We are in Christ. We know the power of his resurrection and thus press forward to the goal: the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Finally, then, through all this, we are blessed to be the Lord's Vineyard.

Amen