

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year A  
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Isaiah 5:1-7  
Pastor Paul Horn

September 28, 2008

Faith

### **Live a Life Full of the Fruits of Faith**

*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 the end of September. We expect certain things. Campaign signs littering the streets and highways; Halloween candy that's been sitting on store shelves since August; cooler weather; and the leaves, oh, the beautiful colors of the leaves that paint the Kentucky hillsides with oranges, reds and yellows. But not this year. The leaves will not be brilliant. It's not the trees' fault. The weather has not been cool and wet, but dry and hot. How does that make you feel when expectations are not met? It's a little different if you had something to do with the color of the leaves. Now when you plant tomatoes, cucumbers and beans you expect those plants to bear their fruit. You've taken the time and effort to water, to fertilize and dig out the weeds. You do everything you can so that those plants can grow. How would you feel, if, after all your work, only one ripe tomato hung from that plant, only one cluster of beans and only one cucumber could be picked? It would be very frustrating, and you might direct your efforts elsewhere.

In our lesson this morning the LORD experiences a similar dilemma. He plants a garden, a vineyard, to grow grapes and make wine. He works very hard and does everything he can so that his vines produce the best grapes. He expects a rich harvest. As he walks through his rows of vines holding with his pruning knife he finds wild grapes, inedible, not suitable for anything but the dung heap.

In vs7 the prophet Isaiah reveals to us that the vineyard represents the nation of Israel. Through other Old Testament prophets the LORD used this picture to describe his chosen people. But in vs4 the LORD cries out, **“What more could I have done for my vineyard than what I have already done?” Look at what I did for my vineyard!**” If all the nations of the world were represented as a giant vineyard, I hand-picked this cluster of grapes, the nation of the Hebrews, to be planted as my special vineyard. And when they were enslaved for over 400 years, I freed them. I then fed my vineyard with

manna for 40 years in the wilderness. I protected them and led them with many miracles. I gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance, the best land, flowing with milk and honey, to fulfill a promise I had made. I gave them laws for their own good. I gave them the written Word with great promises, the greatest promise; that of a Savior from sin. I gave them priests to lead them in worship. I gave them kings to rule and protect. I gave them prophets to warn them and to call them back to repentance. If that was not enough, I would have given them more. What do I find? Good fruit? Lives of service and thankfulness? No! Only wild grapes...

The rest of Isaiah chapter 5 is filled with the “bad grapes”, the sins the Israelites were guilty of. 5:8, “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left,” (greed). 5:11,22,12, “Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks. They have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands,” (gross sexuality and drunkenness). 5:18,19, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight,” (arrogance and pride). 5:20, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness,” (those who have lost all moral sense). And that’s just a partial list.

**“Now I am going to tell you what I am going to do with my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.”** (vs5) The LORD did do just that, didn’t he? 150 years after Isaiah uttered this prophecy the Babylonians trampled God’s vineyard. The Babylonian army tore down the walls of Jerusalem. They destroyed the temple of Solomon. **“I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there.”** (vs6) A gardener prunes branches and digs weeds to make his vineyard more fruitful. Failure to prune and cultivate is a clear sign of God’s judgment. That is when briers and thorns grow as a sign of God’s curse, which we remember well from Genesis 3:17,18. **“I will command the clouds not to rain on it.”** (vs6) Withholding rain was a weapon in God’s arsenal of punishment that he used in the Old Testament as a sign of judgment. (Deut 28:23,24; 1Kings 17:1; Amos 8:11,12) This is starting to sound more like a dirge (funeral march) than a love song for his beloved.

Israel ignored the warnings and God had no choice but to carry out his threats. We cannot be so quick to point the finger, “Oh Israel, why did you have to do these things again and again?” Who of us hasn’t fallen into the greed of the Israelites, where we have squandered our money so that there is none left for the Lord? Who of us hasn’t fallen into the prideful thinking of the Israelites, when we think we know better than God? Who of us has not fallen into the idolatry of the Israelites and worship ourselves? Who of us has not fallen into the sins of drunkenness and the improper sensuality of the Israelites, maybe not in our actions but our thoughts? Who of us has not fallen into the arrogance of the Israelites, when we have thought that we know best how to live our lives, and have had no regard for the works of God’s hands, no respect for his will for our lives? Who of us has ignored all the things that God has done for us and cry out, “What

have you done for me lately, Lord?” God expects good fruit from you and oftentimes he sees bad grapes.

We deserve the same judgment as the Israelites. The LORD ought to take away the hedge and wall that protect us; his mighty hands and his powerful angels. He ought to tear down his watchtower, that is, his ever-watchful eyes. He ought to allow our enemy Satan to trample us. He ought to withdraw his pruning and cultivating, that is, his Word and Sacraments, the food and drink that nourish us, and allow us to wither up and die. We shudder under the wrath of God’s judgment. But we need to hear these warnings from Isaiah. In repentance we turn to the LORD and plead for him to forgive us for all we have done. In repentance, we turn to the LORD out of sincere sorrow for our sins and in faith we turn to him to listen for his gentle words of reassurance and mercy. “Look at what I have done for you, my vineyard.”

The work of the Lord is illustrated in the picture of a master gardener at work preparing and planting his new vineyard. He picks the ideal location. It sits atop a hillside where it will get plenty of sun and rain. He prepares the soil. He cultivates it. He clears it of stones. This was hard work in Palestine. The fields are full of rocks. He is not satisfied with ordinary vines. He plants the best vines that will bear red, juicy grapes. He builds a watchtower in the middle of the field to watch for vandals, robbers and wild animals. He plants a hedge around the vineyard and builds a wall from the stones he picked out of the field. He hews a wine vat out of rock. That’s a lot of work. He does all of the work.

That’s a picture of God’s grace. God and his love do everything. First of all, he chose his vineyard. The Israelites did not ask to be God’s chosen people. He chose them. You did not ask to be a vine in God’s vineyard. The Father came and chose you. He initiated the process through baptism. He took action through your baptism. He removed the stones and weeds from the field of your heart by cleansing it with the precious blood of his Son, Jesus. The Father took you, once a dead branch, and grafted you into the vine, Jesus Christ. Through baptism you are in Christ and he is in you. Through baptism Jesus brought you to life.

As a branch attached to the vine Jesus nurtures you with the food of his Word. He reminds you, “**I am he who blots out your transgressions and remembers your sins no more.**” (Isaiah 43:25) The master vineyard keeper waters you with his Sacraments. He reminds you that by your baptism your sins of greed, sensuality, drunkenness, pride and arrogance have been washed away. Through his Lord’s Supper he gives you his blood to drink and his body to eat as nourishment for your soul, to remind you that you have been grafted into Jesus forever. That’s what keeps a vine healthy. And God expects good fruit from his vines.

That’s what you and I will do. We will flower and blossom and bear good fruit. That’s what God’s love causes us to do. We will live a life full of the fruits of faith. As fruitful vines we will put our God first in our lives with faithful worship attendance and Bible study. As fruitful vines we will take ourselves out of situations where we could fall into improper sexuality and drunkenness. Rather than thinking that we know best how to live

our lives, we will look for direction in our God's Word to see how we can best live our lives in service to him. Instead of being ungrateful for what we have, think about all the things God has done for you. Look around you right now. Who do you see? You see Christian friends who support you with God's Word and who pray for you. You see a pastor who reminds you of God's promises and feeds you with his Sacraments. You see a congregation dedicated to its mission. Today, when go home and step out of your car, stand in your front yard and look around. Walk into your home and pause... and look at everything you have. When you sit down at dinner tonight, what will you see? A loving family that your Father has blessed you with? Food that your Father has sent from heaven? What more could your Father do for you than what he has already done for you? You have been baptized. You are the vineyard of the Lord. Therefore, He expects good grapes from you. You will live a life full of the fruits of faith. You will bring an abundant harvest of luscious, highest-quality grapes for your Father.

This week remind yourself of all that your Father has done for you, his vineyard. May all that your Father and his Son and the Holy Spirit have done for you motivate you to bear fruit for them this week. Amen.