

Fruits of Hard Labor

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: Isaiah 5:1-7



Let

me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² 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; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ 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? ⁵ 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. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry.

Jacob was a hardworking Israelite farmer. He learned from his father that hard work is blessed by God: For Jacob and his friends, the high point of the year was when he could bring a rich harvest to the big harvest festival and lay out before everyone the visible blessing and evidence of the work. There

was only one little problem this certain year: the prophet Isaiah was to speak at the festival. And everyone already knew it. Isaiah was not pleased. Instead of admiring the wonderful harvest, he found faults again. Of course, not everything went well in the last year. One or another worker was let go empty handed. And at one point or another, widows and orphans had to be abandoned. "Where are we going? We can't save the whole world, right?" Jacob said to his friend, Reuben. Naturally some things also didn't go smoothly for the people of Israel. At times there were reports that the rich were favored in court.

At the big festival, everything happened as expected. The fruits of the field lay wonderfully and splendidly on the overflowing table. And then Isaiah stood up. Isaiah examined the beautiful harvest and there was a concerned silence as he began to speak. But the story that Isaiah told was completely different from the expectations of Jacob and his friends. They could hardly believe that Isaiah told a love story. And what's more, he compared this love story with Jacob's work at the vineyard, of all things. The Israelite farmers knew a lot about these two topics of love and work. They listened excitedly to how the lover took care of his beloved, just as a real wine grower takes care of his gardens. The wine grower was rich, and he did everything right. But the story had a tragic end. For some mysterious reason, the fruit didn't appear. Translated to the lover's story, the lover's love remained spurned and unacknowledged even though he had done everything right. It was just as bitter for the lover as if the farmer only had bitter grapevines to harvest after hard work. Jacob and his friends had tears in their eyes. Who didn't understand the great disappointment when a harvest fails despite all the work? And who didn't understand when one has loved, and the love remains unrequited. That's like falling from 7th heaven into the deepest valley. Jacob understood all this very well. He had to think about his children for whom he had done so much. But the children have their own mind, he quietly thought to himself. That's also disappointing. Sometimes you want to shake them, but that will only make things worse. It's difficult not to lose your composure. And if the relationship hasn't worked for a while, love can even change into hate and bitterness. You get the feeling of being abandoned by God and by all people. Jacob and his friends listened intently to Isaiah: How would the story continue? But suddenly, Isaiah turns everything on its head. Now Isaiah really wanted to know from the people of Israel: they should finish the story themselves. They should say how it would continue. They should judge what to do next. But no one dared to finish the story. Finally, Isaiah continued: ⁵ **And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard!** What followed was the greatest nightmare of any Israelite farmer. Total devastation and abandonment by God. And then Isaiah turned things upside down once again. And said something almost incomprehensible: God Himself is the lover and the farmer who cared so much. It is God Himself who spoke for generations and no one wanted to listen to Him. It is God Himself who worked to the limit so that the relationship could be saved. And yet the people remained stubborn. Wait a minute, Jacob and his friends had to think: That's us. We are the ones who have personally scorned God's love. And the matter hit everyone in the heart: the little dishonest business dealings and the disregard for the poor were not only disdain for the poor but for the living God. God didn't look much at the beautiful harvest that was achieved through hard work, but He eagerly awaited justice. Instead of justice, there was bloodshed. God eagerly awaited the precious fruits of love and care for the weakest in society and there came disregard for the poor. And that's why the whole wonderful harvest that was laid out, was a deception!

The question that Isaiah asks is this: What do we do next? And we must ask ourselves this question as modern people of God. Jesus died for us. And we are a church today because God came to us in Jesus.

And because God continued to provide for this church for many generations, we are here and can hear the Gospel. But we must worry. Because in our generation, the church is like a disaster zone. People leave in great numbers every day. But not only in the church, but also in the greater world history, much is in disorder. Scientists calculate that our world will be a disaster zone in a few years. And that's because the last generation relentlessly exploited nature and the environment. The fewer resources there are, the more wars and exploitation spread. And aren't all these symptoms of the fact that we have disregarded and spurned the living God? Is there no other turning point? Do injustice, suffering and selfishness get the victory? Are we forsaken by God? Jesus used the images of Isaiah. He spoke about the unjust winegrowers who, despite all the love of the wine grower, answered with hate. But Jesus looked at the picture even deeper. At the end, Jesus presents us with a special picture: God is not only the grower of the wine, but also the vine! In Jesus, the righteousness of God is among us! And the fruits of Jesus are among us and so tangibly close! They are even a part of us because we can be closely joined to Jesus! "Whoever is in me will bear much fruit," He says to us. "And you can't do anything without Me." Jesus painted a completely new picture for us here. Justice and the good fruit of the Holy Spirit have come! Not because we got to the turn in the road, but only because a completely new reality has entered into our world through Jesus. The new justice is not human justice but Christian justice! It has its origin and its source in Jesus Himself. God showed through Jesus that His love has no limitations. Despite the rejection and rebellion of mankind, He gave not less but more. He gave His all. Is that fair? Yes, and no. It is not fair because the unjust receive justice without paying for it. And it is fair because God remained just to His love. The righteousness of God has no boundaries. God's love has no limitations. What's to be done now? I ask with Isaiah, and answer with a cry of prayer. God be just to me! God be my lover! Amen.