

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We have two vineyard parables presented to us today, one through the Prophet Isaiah and one from the mouth of Jesus. The Lord called the first a *“love song concerning [the beloved’s] vineyard,”* and in the second, the extraordinary love of God is apparent, too.

In the first Assyria is about to overrun Israel and assail Judah for their unfaithfulness. In the second, Judah’s rejection of the beloved of the Father and their own Messiah — at least, by their leadership — will soon be on full display, for Jesus has made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and is preparing to trod the sorrowful road to the cross.

Jesus teaches the people today in a parable of the extraordinary love of God for His church, and He does it by hearkening back to the Lord’s love song for His beloved’s vineyard.

Indeed, anyone familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy would have seen the connection. Both accounts begin similarly. In Isaiah, the beloved of God 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.”* In Jesus’ parable, *“a master of a house ... planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower.”*

But the parables begin to diverge immediately afterward. In Isaiah, although the parable is called a love song, the focus is on *“justice”* and *“righteousness.”* The beloved was looking for the vineyard *“to yield [choice] grapes”* in keeping with the vines he had planted. In Jesus’ parable, on the other hand, the extraordinary love of the master is clearly on display: he sent servants to get his share of the fruit — they were mistreated and killed. Amazingly, he sent more servants with the same result. And even more amazingly, the third time, he sent his own son. And he too was thrown *“out of the vineyard and killed.”*

Now, the Lord Himself tells us who this *“vineyard of the LORD of hosts”* represents. It *“is the house of Israel,”* He says, *“and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.”* It’s the same in Jesus’ parable, although we would say more generally, it is the church.

Moreover, the Lord complains that the choice vines in this vineyard *“yielded [only] wild grapes.”* *“[H]e looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”* *“What more was there to do for my vineyard,”* He lamented, *“that I have not done in it?”* Indeed, the Lord had sent kings and priests and prophets to lead Israel, but many of the kings were evil, many priests were

unfaithful, many prophets were false. They had led the people into idolatry and injustice, bloodshed and outcry.

Of course, not all were wicked; not all led the people astray. Kings like David and Asa and Hezekiah and Josiah were good kings and faithful. They “*did what was right in the eyes of the LORD,*” removing “*the high places*” breaking “*the pillars*” and cutting “*down the Asherah*” (2 Ki. 18:3-4).

But let’s face it, read the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah. Most “*did what was evil in the sight of the LORD*” (1 Ki. 15:26), starting with Solomon whose “*heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel*” (1 Ki. 11:9). Moreover, in their sin, they moved the people to sin (1 Ki. 15:26), to idolatry, and to bloodshed, as the Lord said through Isaiah. Thus, Elijah would lament, through these leaders, “*the people of Israel have forsaken [the Lord’s] covenant, thrown down [His] altars, and killed [His] prophets with the sword*” (1 Ki. 19:10).

Moreover, we know of the prophets who preached God’s word to the people. Yet, the people often did not want to hear their preaching of repentance and returning to the Lord. They didn’t want to hear the preaching of God’s vengeance upon their unfaithfulness. They wanted to shut them up by mistreating the prophets and seeking their death. King Ahab and his queen Jezebel are particularly notorious and caused Elijah no end of trouble. Thus, Jesus, in His retelling of this parable, included the wicked tenants, those whom the master put in charge of his vineyard.

The master “*leased [the vineyard] to tenants, and went into another country,*” Jesus preached. Certainly again, the master was looking for good fruit, just as the beloved had done before. And there was good fruit to be had — the fruit of the righteousness of faith. Multitudes gathered to hear Jesus preach and to have their sick be healed. The crowd had just welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem to shouts of “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*” (Matt. 21:9)! The apostles after Jesus’ ascension preached Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and people were added to the church, being baptized by the thousands. The same is true today; there remains much fruit to be harvested from the Lord’s vineyard.

But, like many of our leaders today, the religious leaders then were having none of it. They were indignant at such praise (Matt. 21:15). They didn’t want the good fruit of faith evident in Jesus’ ministry and at His triumphant entry. “*Look, the world has gone after him,*” they grumbled (John 12:9). They sought to arrest Him and kill Him as their predecessors had done before them to the prophets.

And they accomplished it. As in the parable, when the Son came to the vineyard, He was betrayed into the hands of the scribes and Pharisees and Chief Priests, and He was mistreated — mocked and flogged and scourged. He was thrown out of the city, taken to the Place of the Skull, lifted up on a cross, and nailed there, enduring the

shame of crucifixion and death, but more than that, bearing the weight of the world's sins and enduring the agony of being forsaken of God. And this He did as an expression of His extraordinary love for those who by nature hate Him, so that when the Lord looks for justice in us, He sees not the sins we have committed, the blood we have shed, but Christ's blood shed that cleanses us from our sins, so that when the Lord looks for righteousness in us, He hears not the outcry of victims, but of the One victim, Jesus Christ: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). "*Father, forgive them*" (Luke 23:34). For "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:10).

The Son endured all this unto death, but rising again on the third day, and ascending to the right hand of the Father, He will come again some day to judge the living and the dead, and on that day He will say to us faithful tenants of the vineyard, built upon "*the stone the builders rejected*": not "*put those wretches to a miserable death,*" but "*well done, good and faithful [tenants]*" (Matt. 25:21), "*producing ... fruits*" for the kingdom of God. Then we righteous ones will receive life, for, on that day, we will see that the inheritance comes not by rejecting the Son and killing Him, but by falling on this rejected Stone and breaking to pieces our sinful pride and hard hearts in repentance, by looking to the Son and believing in Him, by partaking in the sacramental fruit of the Tree of Life. Then we will hear the glorious words: "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*" (Matt. 25:34).

Oh, the extraordinary love of God in the Son — oh, the extraordinary love of God for His church — "Oh love, how deep, how broad, how high!" (LSB544)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.