



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

September 28, 2008
20th Sunday after Pentecost
Isaiah 5:1-7
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 5:1-7
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118
Second Lesson: Philippians 3:12-21
Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

Listen to a Love Song

A joyful song of God's love for sinners
A sad song of our love for God

It's a pain that really is unlike any other pain in this world. It's a pain that goes far beyond any physical pain that you might endure. It's a pain that just cuts to the heart and leaves the heart wide open and bleeding. It's a pain that is the basis of many a country song. It's the pain of loving someone and not having them love you back. If you've experienced that in your life, you know what I am talking about. It truly is a pain unlike any other.

Could you hear the pain in the voice of our God as I read to you from Isaiah 5? That's exactly what He is describing, isn't He? "I did everything for my people. I loved them with a love that is so perfect that it goes beyond understanding, and they yawned. They slept. They looked the other way. And then when things went bad," like we heard last week, "they pointed the finger at me."

This morning we get this insight and listen to this song of love, this love song that our God sings. He sings it about the Israelites and we see what happened to them in history, but it also is a song of love that speaks to us because our Lord has done incredible things for us. And we need to ask ourselves, how do we respond to His love? Because He lays before us also a pretty strong warning that when we turn our backs on God, when we find other things more important than God, when we think we have the answers and don't need God, He tells us eventually we are going to be knocked down. And if we separate from God completely, we are going to endure the agony of hell.

I don't claim to know a whole lot about vineyards. I have eaten grapes. I have never raised them. I think the people that Isaiah was writing to, the Holy Spirit was leading him to write to, and the people Jesus spoke to in our Gospel would have understood this picture a lot better than I can, but I can get the point. I think you probably can too. When God is saying "the vineyard," it's something they knew and understood. It's what they saw in their daily life. He said, "Look at what I did for this vineyard. I worked really hard. I dug it up and cleared all the stones out." That you probably can relate to right?—the hard work that is involved in clearing stones out of a field. But He did all of this. Maybe He used those stones to build that wall He talks about later that the hedge was inside of. He built a watchtower, maybe with some of those stones that he cleared out. He prepared the soil. He planted the best vines He could possibly find. He did

everything He could possibly do for it. That much I can understand. Then He looked for the fruit that would come. And it didn't come. And it didn't come. So He said, "You know what? The Lord your God is a patient God, but even His patience has an end because there is an ultimate time when you face the music for your relationship to God." And for the children of Israel, it was when the Babylonians came and carried them off into captivity. They were destroyed. The ground was laid bare.

Think about it—the Lord had done everything He could for His people, right? He had chosen them. They hadn't done anything to make Him choose them. They weren't better than anyone else. He simply chose them because that is His nature.

He got them down to Egypt to avoid a famine. They were there for a long time, but He brought them back out in miraculous ways. He provided for them a land flowing with milk and honey in many miraculous ways. He had the sun stand still so they could defeat their enemy. He made the walls of Jericho fall down without doing much more than taking a nice walk and raising their voices. He had done incredible things for the children of Israel. He sent to them prophets. He sent to them His message not only of "I'm going to take care of you physically, but I'm going to take care of you spiritually because there is one coming that is going to destroy the serpent's head. There is one coming who will be the Lord your righteousness because you know what, you're not righteous."

God did everything for the children of Israel, yet they always chased after other gods, they chased after other things, and eventually they were destroyed. They were carried off, but God did bring them back in His love so that the temple could be theirs, so that Jesus could be theirs, so that He could live and die in their place and in our place.

The love that our God has for us, for you and for me, is an incredible love. It's absolutely perfect. It's not because you are a good person. It's not because you do good or you dress good. It's not even because this morning you maybe even smell good. It's none of these things. It's because He is God. It's because He is love. He loves you in spite of who you are. He loves me in spite of who I am. You and I are not a whole lot different from the Israelites.

Last week we looked at that proverb that said, "The fathers eat sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge." They were blaming God for some of their problems. They were saying it was His fault and that He was punishing them for things they hadn't done. We are kind of that way. We don't think we are as bad as others. We think our sins are not that terrible or certainly not demanding destruction like someone else's.

When you hear these words that warn about falling away from God and if you don't turn back to the Lord in love, who comes to your mind? Who do you think of and say to yourself, "Boy, this person really needs to hear this message"? Does someone come to your mind? Do you think of someone who really needs to hear this warning, "Don't fall away or you are going to end up in hell"? Is it the person you looked at in the mirror

when you woke up this morning? Is that the first person that comes to mind? Or is it someone else?

I would wager that the vast majority of us, when we think of someone who needs to hear this warning, we could probably point the finger in a lot of different directions, but the person God is speaking to is us, right? I can't control how you react to God's love for you in Christ. I can't control how you react to His warnings, to the message of His Law that says, "This means you should go to hell." I can't control any of that in you, but I can control it in me, right? I can listen to His Word and hear His warning and say, "I need to take that to heart." I need to look at my life and see where I have failed my God as a father, as a husband, as a pastor, as a friend, as a son, whatever it might be. I need to hear His warning. I need to hear where I need to be warned to stay close to God. Don't let other things drive a wedge between you and God. Find time for His Word. Find time for worship. That's not a problem. I have to be here right?

Does that mean my heart has to always be here? No right? Can I stand up here and lead worship and have my heart a million miles away? Sure. So I need to hear this warning and apply it first of all to myself and then, when I see what a wretched sinner I am, I need to flee to God's love and mercy.

Then, as a fruit of faith, as a fruit of what God is looking for from me, when He has touched my heart, I live to serve Him and I live to help my brothers and sisters in Christ. This is also where we all are. We look at ourselves first. We hear the warning. We recognize that God is serious. God is not just the grandpa that thinks it's real cute when their grandchild breaks the lamp because they can send them home and say "Isn't that neat. I can just replace it. I have no problem buying lamps anymore."

God is serious about sin. He was so serious about sin that He sent Himself to become one of us to be perfect because you and I can't be perfect. To take all of our sins to the cross and hang there and endure the agony of hell so that you and I never will have to. This is the song of love He sings for us. And that's amazing to me.

Think about it—if you have a friend and they treat you like you and I treat God at times, what are you going to do to that friend? Are you going to go up to them the next time you see them and throw a big hug around them and plant a big wet one on his cheek and say, "Happy to see you"? Of course not! You are going to do what country songs say, right? Get a nice bat. Smash the lights on his pickup. Key his car. Rip up the leather seats, right? Isn't that what you are going to do when someone doesn't love you back that you love or hurts you? That's how you and I act. That's our sinful nature. That's what we would want to do. This is what makes God's love for you and me in Christ so amazing and such a source of strength for our daily lives. He doesn't act that way.

When you and I have hurt Him, when you and I have wounded Him, when you and I have not loved Him the way He has loved us, you heard the pain in His voice, but when you and I see the error of our ways, when His Spirit leads us to say, "Lord, I have hurt

you. Forgive me! Lord, forgive me for despising your love.” Our God says to us, “I forgive you. I’m still crazy about you. I love you perfectly. Here’s my very body and blood in, with and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of your sins, just in case you’re worried I don’t love you. Taste it. Touch it. Smell it. Rejoice in it.” Our God looks at us and says, “I am absolutely crazy about you, and I always will be.”

And that love that He has for us is what leads us then to produce the fruits of faith, to live for Him and not for ourselves, to keep working at beating down our sinful nature so that it doesn’t win so many of the struggles that you and I have in our lives, to let the part of us that loves God live to serve Him; live to serve Him by encouraging one another, by admonishing one another, by forgiving one another and by helping each other through the difficult times that we will face because we live in a sinful world.

God has made this congregation into His vineyard. He has given us all the care, all the tools, all the things that He wants us to have. Now He gives us the opportunity to produce the fruit by living and loving and helping and encouraging one another all because we have a God who keeps singing a love song of just how crazy He is about us.

It doesn’t get any better than that!