

The Song of a Broken Heart
LWML Sunday, Oct. 4, 2020
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Isaiah 5:1-7 - What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield good grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

- 1. What more could I have done?**
- 2. This is what I'm going to do.**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The kingdom of God is like a man who found out one day his wife had been cheating on him. He asked her why and she looked away. He asked her if she still loved him, to which she replied, "I don't know." He asked her if she wanted a divorce, and with tears in her eyes, she nodded her head yes. That night he tossed and he turned. He racked his brain wondering what he did wrong and what more he could have done right, his wife had turned to the arms of another, his heart was broken into a thousand pieces, he fell asleep singing the only song that made sense anymore, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

The kingdom of God is like a mom and a dad who had raised their son the best they could. They had prayed with him, they raised him with grace and with love, they took him to church, they taught him right from wrong. But, then, he started using drugs. Drugs led to what it often leads to - lying and stealing and treatment centers and country jails and drug court, and eventually they let him go. They gave him over to his addiction, and now, there he was, laying in their arms, the doctors tell you that he's taken so many drugs he probably won't make it through the night. Their hearts are broken, their minds are racing, they wonder what they had done wrong and what more could they have done right, they fell asleep that night singing the only song that made sense anymore, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

In today's Old Testament Lesson, God is the singer with the broken heart. He is the lover who has planted a vineyard that was supposed to produce sweet wine, but all he finds in the vineyard of Jerusalem is the sour and rotten fruit of injustice and violence against the poor and the needy. He had chosen the nation of Israel for the purpose of producing the Savior of the world, He had loved them with an everlasting love, He had watched over them and provided for them, He had kept every one of His promises, His one great desire was for them to be repenting and bearing the fruits of the repentance, and yet time and time again, He came looking for fruit only to find immorality, idolatry, and impenitence. Again and again He wondered what more could I have done?

Our sermon theme on this LWML Sunday is "The Song of a Broken Heart." Two parts to this song by God the jilted lover. One is a question, "What more could I have done?" And the second is a statement, "This is what I'm going to do."

Sermon Part I - What more could I have done?

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The people of Israel knew about grapes. One of the three harvest festivals was the autumn festival of booths, Sukkoth, which recalled the wilderness wandering of the Hebrew people and the grape harvest. Scholars believe that it was at this festival, that Isaiah the prophet rose up and delivered The Song of the Vineyard. It starts out as a love song, reminding us of a best man giving a speech at the wedding reception. It is clear that the farmer loves his vineyard, even as a groom loves his bride.

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 press in it, and he looked for it to yield grapes.

From our Christian perspective, we can use our 20/20 vision to see that God had chosen Israel out of all the nations of the world to be His chosen race. Luther identifies the choice vines as our forefathers in the faith, Abraham, Isaac, David, and the faithful kings of Israel. Luther interprets the wine press as the daily drowning of our old sinful nature by way of repentance. He describes the watchtower as symbolic of God's Word and promises.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells a parable that is easy to understand. The practice of renting out vineyards to tenant farmers was well known. It was a win-win situation for both owner and renters. The renters gained a place in which to live and work and share in the harvest. The owner benefited by having his vineyard properly cared for and be productive.

God is the Owner who had loved the nation of Israel out of all the nations of the world. He had delivered them out of Egyptian slavery with a mighty display of plagues and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. He had given them commandments in writing, He had provided Israel with a sacrificial system in which they could be forgiven their sins, He had literally dropped manna and meat from the sky, He had led them with a pillar of clouds by day and fire by night. Against all odds, God had handed them victory after victory in the Promised Land. What more could He have done for them?

Israel was that vineyard that had consistently disappointed the Lord. The tenants were the religious leaders who had been given responsibility for caring for Israel. Again and again the Lord had sent His prophets to guide and correct and was in the very act of sending His own Son to get His fruit.

It was with a broken heart that Jesus looked out over Jerusalem one day and lamented how often He would have gathered their children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but they were not willing. Ultimately, it was with a broken heart that our Father in heaven insisted that His Son make His way to the cross, He made sure that His only Son would be stricken, smitten, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon

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him was the chastisement that brought us peace, with his wounds we are healed. Is there any more that our God could have done?

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who begin each day grateful for all that God has done. Every day, they make the sign of the cross, they remember they are the redeemed and baptized children of God. Every day, they know that they have fallen short, every day their good intentions go awry in one way or another, every day, they cry out for mercy, and every morning, mercy is theirs. More and more their gratefulness is spilling out in acts of generosity, more and more, they wonder how they could do marriage and family better, they wonder how their Gospel lights could shine brighter, they wonder how they could do Sunday School and Confirmation Class and Fellowship meals more joyfully, they wonder how their life together could bear more fruit for the glory of God!

Sermon Part II - This is what I'm going to do. In today's Old Testament, our Lord's love song takes a turn into judgment. **And now I will tell you what I will do with my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured. I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain no more.**

These predictions all came true. The northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by Assyria and taken into bondage. The ten tribes were lost and never heard from again. Judah was defeated by Babylon and taken into exile. The land was devastated, the temple destroyed, the mighty brought low. As was true with many of our parents in the good old days, when God issues a threat, He carries through with it. Just as surely as He never makes a promise without delivering, so also He never issues a warning without following through.

Dear friends, listen carefully. Again and again the Bible teaches us that when God looks for response to His love, He looks to how we are treating one another and helping others in their needs. The leaders of the Church in Jesus' day were religious, in terms of ritual, but not in terms of helping and befriending their neighbors in time of need. They were seeing to it that the temple rituals were faithfully carried out, but the rich were getting richer at the expense of the poor. They were honoring God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. Injustices and inequalities were rampant in their society

This very day, Christ would plead with us to look into our own hearts and to ask ourselves the hard questions. Could we do more in terms of meeting the needs of our neighbors and our community? Could we do more in terms addressing the injustices and the inequalities rampant in our society? Could we do more in terms of reaching out with the love of Jesus Christ to the hungry, the homeless, and the oppressed?

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This is what I'm going to do. In today's Gospel lesson, what the vineyard owner decided to do after the tenants beat and killed his servants is as amazing as it gets. He decided to send his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." What God decided to do after centuries of Israel stoning and beating and killing prophets was to send His Son in the flesh to live among us for a time. And not just to live among us for a time, but to pour out His life as a drink offering for sinners yet in their sin.

Dear Friends in Christ, this very day, Jesus would look us in the eyes and say, *This is what I'm going to do.* In the preaching and teaching of My Word, I will continue to come into your midst. In the waters of Baptism, I will continue to claim your children as sons and daughters of my Father in heaven. In the eating and drinking of the Supper, I will be present in my body which has broken, I will be present in my blood which has been poured out.

This is what I'm going to do - as often as you are still and know that God is God, I will be holding you close. As often as you ask for my will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, it will be done. As often as you cry out for forgiveness, forgiveness will be yours. As often as you ask for stronger faith, stronger faith will be yours. As often as you come to me for rest, rest will be yours.

The kingdom of God is like a nation full of people who feel as though darkness is in charge. Whether it be their educational system, their personal finances, or their politics, it seems as though the enemies of their faith are prevailing. And yet all across this nation, there are little flocks of God's people huddling together in beautiful sanctuaries. All across the nation, little pockets of believers are still repenting, still growing in faith, still bearing fruit. All across the nation, faithful folks are still trusting that Jesus Christ is still sitting at the right hand of their Father in heaven, still trusting that Jesus is still ruling all of heaven and earth with authority. This very night, if you listen closely, you will be hearing a few of them with broken and contrite hearts singing, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Amen.