

Scriptures: Luke 12:49-56; Isaiah 5:1-7

Major and Minor Prophets

This summer we've looked at a few Old Testament prophets. Last week Janice started looking at the writings of the prophet Isaiah with you. Isaiah was a major prophet. You might hear people refer to his book, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Ezekiel, and the book of Daniel as the Major Prophets, and the other twelve as the Minor Prophets. That has nothing to do with what any of these guys were doing or saying. The prophets are major or minor based on the length of their books. So the Minor Prophets wrote less than the Major Prophets. That's all it is.

Isaiah was a major prophet – his book is 66 chapters long. He was active during the same time period as Amos, Hosea, and Micah. He lived, and did his ministry in the area surrounding Jerusalem, in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. According to Jewish tradition, he was sawed in half during the reign of the wicked King Manasseh of Judah. Prophets have a tendency of making people uncomfortable. A lot of people would rather silence a prophet than listen to hear what God would say that they need to change in themselves! This week we're going to wrap up our time with Isaiah. If you brought your Bible or have a Bible app handy, turn with me to Isaiah 5:1-7. **Read Isaiah 5:1-7.**

"I will sing for the One I love a song about His vineyard: My Loved One had a vineyard on a fertile hillside," Isaiah tells us in verse one of our Scripture this morning. It sounds like a beautiful poem. Or maybe even the beginnings of a song – we might call it a ballad. Now, just so we're clear on what this type of writing is, I'm going to give you three quick examples. If you go out to Google, and search "ballad," you get lists of hundreds of songs and poems.

Ballads

I've chosen three, just because I want to keep moving, and don't want to lose you in the details. I'm going to give these examples in reverse order of when they were written. There's a modern-day singer, Christina Perri, who wrote a song in 2011, called *A Thousand Years*. She sings in part, "I have died every day waiting for you. Darling, don't be afraid, I have loved you, for a thousand years, I'll love you for a thousand more."

The second was written in the 1970's, by a group named Bread, and the song is called *If*. They sing, in part, "If a face could launch a thousand ships, Then where am I to go? There's no one home but you, You're all that's left me to, And when my love for life is running dry, You come and pour yourself on me." The last one, I hope most

people can connect with, is *Can't Help Falling In Love*, by Elvis Presley. He sings in part, "Wise men say, Only fools rush in, But I can't help falling in love with you."

I'm hoping you can relate to at least one of those songs. Those are ballads. They're songs written that share a common theme – a theme of someone deeply in love with another, trying to express that feeling. These are all speaking of romantic love. In our text today, Isaiah has written a ballad – a song – which also speaks of a romantic love. It speaks of a God who time and time again, tries to woo and wow His people into faithful relationship, only to be rejected over and over again.

Unrequited Love

In the study of literature, they call that unrequited love. It's a love that is felt by one side, but for whatever reason, it's not returned by the other. Maybe you've been in situations or relationships where you can relate to that feeling. I know I have been in the past. Friends, that's what we see playing out in Isaiah's book, in general, and in our Scripture today, in particular. God constantly pursuing and wooing His people, only to have them turn their back on Him in pursuit of idols.

In this first verse, God's comparing the nation of Israel to a vineyard. Have you ever been to a vineyard? Kendra and I enjoy going up to South Bass Island – Put-in-Bay – and spending a day up there. As you drive around the island in a golf cart, you quickly see acres upon acres of vineyards. A well-tended vineyard is a beautiful thing to see!

Not only are they pretty to look at, but they are also a great financial asset to their owners. There are two different wineries on South Bass Island. The kid-friendly one where we stop – Heineman's – gives tours of their facility for a fee, so you can see how the grapes go from being grapes, to being grape juice and wine. At the end, they offer you a glass of either wine or grape juice. There's nothing quite like a glass of cold, unpasteurized Catawba grape juice! A bottle of it sells for \$7.00.

God Did the Work

Isaiah tells us what God did for Israel – which is ancient history by this point. "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," (Isa. 5:2a). In every situation, God is the One who did the work. God carried the people into the land of Canaan, or as the Jewish people from the time of Moses onward called it, the Promised Land. In other words, what we're being told here is that God had put a lot of work into shaping and forming His people into the people He wanted them to be. He poured out blessing upon blessing on them.

He doesn't just build a shelter or a shack for His people – He builds them a watchtower. Something solid. Sturdy. Protective. He had done amazing things for His

people, but look what happens at the end of the second verse. “Then He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit,” (Isa. 5:2b). How disappointing!

When you see a beautiful vineyard – like we did on South Bass Island – you expect to find really good grapes, which in turn, will make really good wine. Instead, God finds the fruit to be worthless! Of course, we’re not talking about – Isaiah’s not writing about literal vineyards and grapes – we’re talking about God’s people being a bunch of bad grapes. Sour grapes. It’s a good word for us to think about today – because when we focus on the junk swirling around us, we have a tendency to pick up the nasty habits, and put out more sour grapes instead of sweet ones.

Like Draws to Like

I hope you understand what I’m saying. It’s like that old saying, “one bad apple spoils the bunch.” Like draws to like. You won’t see an eagle sitting on the telephone line with a bunch of starlings. The starlings all flock together, and the eagle does his thing. We’re called to be eagles – and to do the hard work Christ has called us to do – of loving God and others, even when it’s not popular politically, comfortable financially, or respectable religiously.

Did you catch what Jesus said in our first Scripture passage today? He says, “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three,” (Luke 12:51-52). Then He talks about the splintering of a family unit in that passage over people choosing to follow Him. He expects us to follow Him. And in the following, we may find ourselves very much a solitary creature, like the eagle, because we’re staying true to course, rather than going with the flow or following the crowd. Since 1968, the mission of the United Methodist Church has been “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” And your mission statement, New Hope, is very much like it. “To make disciples of Jesus Christ and to bring hope, grace, and salvation to God’s people.”

That’s what we’re called to do. It’s all a part of us taking up our cross and following Him. Well, God next makes a plea to the people of Jerusalem in our text. He says, “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. 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?” (verses 3-4). He’s done everything He could possibly do to give His people the best life imaginable, and yet they still continue to turn their backs on Him!

Maybe you’ve experienced that before. You give yourself – you pour yourself out for this other person – and they turn their back on you. It’s a heartbreaking experience. Someone you love so much, just turning a blind eye, treating you worse than a

stranger. Life is tough. People sometimes may say that “time heals all wounds.” Have you heard that before? The problem is, that it’s not always true.

Sweating Blood

The emotional hurting from the betrayal, it’s always there just under the surface. You see something on television, or hear someone say something, and it pricks your heart all over again. I often think of Jesus in the Garden on the night He was betrayed by Judas. “He [Jesus] withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them [His disciples] and prayed, ‘Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.’ An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground,” Luke (22:41-44) records.

Can you imagine being in such anguish that you sweat blood? Our Savior did – and then died on the cross the next day on our behalf! He gets us. He understands us better than we understand ourselves – and He loves us despite all our flaws!

Listen to what God tells Isaiah He’ll do with Israel – that kingdom in the North. He says, “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. 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,” (Isa. 5:5-6). In other words, He’s going to wipe the nation out. It’s going to disappear off the map.

Looking For Justice and Righteousness

Why is God so worked up? Why is He so angry with His people? He tells them! “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,” (verse 7).

When we first started this sermon series, we talked about word plays. The prophets loved them – they made great points with them, which we lose in translation. Isaiah has a word play in this last verse today. God looks for justice. In the Hebrew language He’s looking for mishpat, with a /t/ at the end.

Instead, He finds bloodshed, or mispah, with an /h/. They sound almost alike! He looks for righteousness – zedaqah – but finds distress – zeaqah. Just a single letter difference changes the entire meaning of the word.

So what’s the big take-away for today? A lot of questions for us to individually and collectively do some soul-searching over. Are we yielding good fruit, or are we yielding wild, sour grapes? When God looks at His people, the Church, does He see justice or bloodshed? Does He see righteousness, or hear cries of distress? Do our

actions and the way we treat others really reflect the One who we say we believe in? Or does our inaction and insensitivity towards others not like us, leave the Holy One singing a sad ballad of unrequited love?

Prayer: Holy One, You love justice and hate oppression; You give peace to those who seek it, and You condemn the rage of violence. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and, following Your servants and prophets, help us look to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. Amen.