

## Isaiah 5:1-7

Life is full of **surprises**. Some of them are **good**, while others are **not** so good. In our sermon text for today, we read about a **bad** surprise for the LORD. The song of the LORD's vineyard presents a picture of **sour grapes** - not at all what the LORD expected to **find** in His vineyard. But the picture isn't really about **grapes** at all, it's about the sour behavior of the people of **Judah** - God's **children**. The question we have to ask ourselves today is: When God looks at **us** - His children in this **present** day and age - **What Kind Of Fruit Will He Find?**

This prophecy of Isaiah comes in the form of a **song**. It's a song about a man who owns a **vineyard**. The **first** part of the song shows just how well that man **prepared for** and **took care** of his vineyard. We learn first of all that he selected the best **place** for his vineyard to be planted - on a fertile **ridge**, where the **soil** was good, and the **drainage** was excellent. Then he did everything he needed to do to get this land ready for **planting**. He dug it **up**, and he cleared away the **stones**. Any of you who have ever spent time picking stones in a field know that this is a very **tedious** and **laborious** process. But the effort was **worth it**, because this man was **determined** to make his vineyard the best one around. Next we're told that he planted his vineyard with the **best vines** - again, sparing no **expense**, so he would have vines that would certainly produce the **best** fruit. In the **middle** of the vineyard, he built a **watchtower**, so that he would have a place to **stand guard** over the vineyard, and make sure no one would come in and **steal** his harvest. In addition, he cut out a **winepress** - an area where the workers could **stomp** the grapes and collect the **juice** - making the entire process from **start** to **finish** - the most **efficient** it could be.

Of course, this song isn't **only** about a **man** and his **vineyard**. Verse seven of our text makes it clear what Isaiah was singing about: "*The vineyard of the LORD of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the planting that was pleasing to him.*" The great care which the man in the song took in **preparing** and **planting** his vineyard, is a symbol of how greatly the **LORD** cared for His **people, Israel**. Think about how the LORD had taken care of them in the **past**. He **chose** them out of all the nations of the earth, and said that they would be **His own**. He brought them out of their **slavery** in Egypt. He defeated **enemy** after **enemy** for them, so that they could take **possession** of the Promised Land. He gave them His **Word** - sending them **prophet** after **prophet** to remind them of the **covenant** He had made with them. And what was the end **result** of all that loving care? What **happened** as the song continued?

We're told that the vineyard owner had planted the **best** vines in the **best** place with the **best** possible protection, so naturally, he would expect to be able to harvest the **best grapes**. But when the vineyard owner **looked** at his crop, he didn't **find** the best grapes. Instead, he found **bad** grapes - **sour** grapes. The Hebrew word that Isaiah used here actually means "**stinking** things." In other words, these grapes weren't just **sour** - they were **rotten**. In fact they were the exact **opposite** of what the vineyard owner had **expected** from his vineyard.

**Rotten** - that's a perfect description of **Israel's actions** toward the LORD. The LORD looked at His special people, and He found something which was completely **unexpected**. They weren't acting like His dearly loved **children**. They were doing just the **opposite**. As Isaiah said, "*He expected **justice**, but instead there was **oppression**. He expected **righteousness**, but there was an **outcry**.*" God didn't find **good fruit** among His people. They were not producing **God-pleasing** actions. Instead, He found actions that were **rotten** - acts of **idolatry**, and **violence**, and **sexual immorality**, and all kinds of **other** evil things. We can sense the LORD's **frustration** and **disappointment** with His people, and His **disapproval** of their behavior when He said, "*What **more** could have been done for my vineyard that I have not already **done** for it? When I expected it to produce clusters of **sweet** grapes, why did it produce **sour** grapes?"*

The question is, do Isaiah's words apply to us **today** - and the answer is **yes**. Isaiah was writing about the **physical** Children of Israel in Old Testament times. But his words still ring true for the **spiritual** Children of Israel today - that's **us**. Just like God took **care** of His children in the Old Testament, He has taken care of **us** very well too. It's really **amazing** just how **well** the LORD takes care of us. He's given us all kinds of **physical** blessings - our **health**, our **homes**, our **families** and **friends**. He has also taken care of our **spiritual** needs by providing us with His **Word** and **Sacraments**, giving us a **church home** here at Trinity, and giving us **Christian** family members and friends to **encourage** us on our path through life. We have been provided with so many wonderful **advantages**.

And yet **What Kind Of Fruit Does God Find** when He looks into our lives? Does He find the **good** fruit that He is **looking** for? That **good** fruit would be the fruit of the **Spirit** which the Apostle Paul wrote about in his letter to the **Galatians**: "*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" Is that the fruit which God sees in our lives, or does He sometimes find just the **opposite** in us? When our God examines our lives, does He see **selfishness** and **anger** - does He hear **filthy** words and **coarse** jokes - does He expose **broken** promises and a **lack of zeal** for His **Word**

and His **mission**? Could God look down at His people here at **Trinity** and say the same thing He said about the Children of **Israel**: *“What more could have been **done** for my vineyard that I have not **already** done for it? When I **expected** it to produce clusters of **sweet** grapes, why did it produce **sour** grapes?”*

That’s the **sad** part of the story - the realization that we have not lived up to God’s **expectations** of us. But here’s the really **frightening** part of the story. The owner of the vineyard **didn’t keep caring** for his vineyard after it yielded those **sour** grapes. Instead, he let the vineyard be **overrun** and **destroyed**. That was the **judgment** which was facing God’s people. Their evil **words** and **actions** had dire **consequences**. The LORD said, “If you don’t want to **act** like **My people**, then I’m not going to **treat you** like My people.” And it wasn’t very long before the LORD allowed the Babylohan **invaders** to come and carry away the Children of Israel into **captivity**. In our **Gospel** reading for today, Jesus spoke about this impending judgment for **us** as well, when He said, *“The kingdom of God will be **taken away** from you and given to a people that **produces its fruit**.”*

Wherever people **trample** on God’s grace and produce **rotten** fruit, His **judgment** is not far behind. How far off is His judgment on **us** - on our **congregation**, on our **synod**, on our **state**, on our **country** - on our **world**? Martin Luther compared the gift of the Gospel to a **rain shower**. It falls on a place **for a while** until it’s no longer being received by **faithful hearts**, and then it goes off **somewhere else** where it’s received with **joy**. After the Lutheran Reformation, the country of Germany certainly **enjoyed** that Gospel shower, as the cathedrals were **filled** with worshipers, and God’s Word was being taught in its **truth** and **purity**. But the situation in Germany is completely **different** today. Those same huge cathedrals are now almost **empty** on a Sunday morning. The shower of the **Gospel** has moved on.

Is that the future for **our** country too? How much longer will we be able **enjoy** the Gospel’s shower, before the LORD takes it **away**, and moves it on to somewhere **else**? Christianity is growing rapidly in places like **Africa** and **Asia**. What is its future here in **America**? More and more Americans are turning **away** from the truth of **God’s Word**, to a **self-determined** truth - which is **no truth** at all. As Paul told the Romans, *“Such people have traded the **truth** about God for the **lie**, worshipping and serving the **creation** rather than the **Creator** ... For this reason God **handed them over** to disgraceful **passions**.”* There’s certainly a **warning** for us to be found in these words from Isaiah. In fact, if these seven verses from Isaiah’s prophecy were the **only** words we had to go on, that would be the **end** of the story. But thankfully, we know that there’s **more** to the story. God’s

**judgment** always stands side-by-side with His **mercy** and **grace**. Yes, God did bring **judgment** on the Children of Israel, and He had them carried off into **captivity** for 70 years. But in His **mercy**, He preserved for Himself a **remnant** of faithful believers, and out of that tiny **remnant** came a young woman named **Mary**. Her firstborn **child** was the **embodiment** of God's love and mercy - He was **God's** own son - Jesus Christ, our **Savior**.

Jesus came to bring **judgment** on an **unbelieving** world, but He also came to offer **hope** to all who would **believe** in **Him** for their salvation - regardless of **race** or **social** status. Jesus came to bring hope to **you**, to **me**, and to **all** people - and He **did** it by taking the **punishment** for our sins on **Himself**. The **rejection** that we deserved because of our sins, was completely removed by the **payment** which Jesus made on the cross. The cross is where God's **judgment** meets God's **mercy**. There we see His **judgment** on **sin**, but we also see His **mercy** in applying that judgment to His **Son** and not to **us**. When we place our trust in **Jesus**, we don't need to be **afraid** of God's wrath, because we know that we have **forgiveness** through Jesus.

That's why we can come away from this worship service today with **hope** for a brighter future. God has taken great **care** of us. He has accomplished our **salvation** through His Son. And Jesus has given us **hope**. He is worthy of our **praise**, and we can **offer** that praise by producing **good** fruit - **sweet** fruit - "*The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" We do these things not because we **have** to, or because God will **destroy** us if we don't. But rather, we do these things because they are our way of saying **thank you** to a God who has cared for us in the **past**, who is caring for us **right now** in the **present**, and who will **continue** to care for us until He ultimately takes us home to **heaven**. Amen.