

Scripture:

Isaiah 5:1-7

[1] Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. [2] He dugged 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; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

[3] And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. [4] What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

[5] And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

[6] 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 rain upon it.

[7] For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

THE WORD OF THE LORD

Devotion:

God's love for us is like the love of one who plants a vineyard on a gentle hillside, clears the stones, protects it with a fence, builds a watchtower and a winepress, all simple pictures of what God has done and is doing even now reclaim and to safeguard our lives.

But when the one who loves the vineyard, who cleared it and planted it and protected it patiently year after year comes in due time to harvest the choice grapes, only wild grapes are growing. Again, a simple picture of how so often our lives do not go as God wills or

even as we promise. The bitter taste of wild grapes, too bitter to eat, too bitter for wine. God looks for justice and finds bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.

Now at this point in the story, we want God to try longer, just be patient, maybe let the vines have another year to mature. If the California vintner will sell no wine before its time, surely God should not be in such a rush.

The truth is that as much as God is patient, even more God is righteous. God will not wait forever. God will not go on forever tolerating sin or stubbornness or the wild grapes of our willfulness. As much as God is gracious, even more God is just.

Tucked into the text is a simple lament on God's part: "What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done it?" It is as if God is speaking directly to you and me: What more can I do for you? How long must I wait for you?

Of course we must read scripture forward and backward. Read forward, this text doesn't look good for us. We have worn out God's patience, and the breaking down of our institutions, our economy, our health, and our lives is just what we deserve.

Read backwards, however, we see that, yes, there is one more thing God can and does do for the vineyard. From the very heart of God comes one who is God in our midst, born into a world of injustice, in a season of bloodshed, a time filled with the cries of the desolate, one whose life is broken to mend the brokenness of our lives and whose very blood is shed to become the wine that redeems the vineyard.

Prayer:

We praise you, O God, that you do not abandon us to our own brokenness but that you take our plight upon yourself through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.