

Lessons for The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 4, 2020

Psalm 80:7-19 ~ *Pleading Israel's history as God's fruitful vine, the psalmist prays for restoration to God's care.*

Isaiah 5:1-7 ~ *Israel, like a carefully prepared vineyard that yielded only bad fruit, would be destroyed.*

Philippians 3:4b-14 ~ *St. Paul didn't count on his own accomplishments after he came to know Christ as Lord.*

Matthew 21:33-46 ~ *Jesus warned that tenants who do not produce fruit from their vineyard will lose it.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: We Owe God our Lives and our Love.

Israel in Isaiah's day was like a vineyard that had enjoyed the careful pruning and cultivating of a loving landowner, but in an act of defiance, refused to produce good grapes. Such a vineyard is as ungrateful as the tenants Jesus described, who killed the landowner's son in an attempt to secure the vineyard for themselves. St. Paul reminds us that everything we have accomplished on our own is worth nothing compared to the righteousness God has given us in Christ through faith. Our lives are dedicated to God and reflect his love for the people of this world.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Gracious God, You have planted me like a vine in a vineyard to bear good fruit by championing justice in this world. Help me recognize opportunities to show Your love to my neighbors in acts of righteousness so that I may live as a good citizen of Your kingdom. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: Christ Jesus has made us His own by bearing our justice; He calls us to bear fruits of righteousness for Him, restoring those who are alienated and giving aid to the helpless, because in them we see the face of Christ.

OFFERING PRAYER: In the Vineyard of the Lord,
Use these gifts to spread God's Word.
Turn our hearts and willing hands
To the tasks that God commands. Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: We are confronted by our failure to produce the kingdom fruits of God's righteousness in the nurture and care of the dispossessed and helpless in our communities and to recognize that when we reject them we reject Jesus (*cf. Matthew 25*). But we are also reassured that the opportunity to work in God's vineyard is a free gift from God ("He will **give** it to others") and that the fruit we are called to produce is His, secured for us by the death of His Son.

Questions to Consider: Righteousness is the Fruit of God's Kingdom.

- What does it mean that God's vineyard produced bloodshed and cries of distress instead of justice and righteousness? (Isaiah 5:7)
- Give some examples of good fruit that God looks for in his vineyard.
- What good was the good fruit St. Paul could point to in his life?
- How is it that we have been given a place to work in God's vineyard?