**August 18, 2019**

**Isaiah 5:1-7**

Last week, Isaiah’s prophetic words began with God demanding followers to both worship God and live in a way that matched their worship. God accused them of putting on a spiritual show in worship; they said and did the right things while they were in church, but their lifestyle proved their worship to be empty and hypocritical. People knew the commandments – to love God, care for the widow, defend the orphan, and rescue the oppressed – but then they didn’t do those things in their everyday lives. So God was angry. God was tired of half-hearted discipleship. God demanded that the people “wash yourselves and make yourselves clean” before they would receive God’s goodness again.

This first chapter of Isaiah tells us what we should already know: that God does not *only* desire our worship; God desires our whole heart and mind and strength. God demands our every moment, every day, every thought and word and deed. And when we give that to God, when we live in that way, we will fulfill God’s hopes for a just creation. People will be loving. We will love God and we will love neighbor and stranger. We will be peace-bringers and patient and gentle. We will practice self-control. But that’s not what happened. God’s children didn’t do as God asked (we have not done as God asked); thus, God is angry.

The fifth chapter of Isaiah is God’s continued lament over the people’s behavior. READ Isaiah 5:1-7.

God began the chapter by saying, “let me sing a love song for my beloved…” Let me sing a love song for my children… Let me sing of how much I love Israel… Then we expect to hear a tender love song telling of how God cares for God’s children. Or we expect a grand, sweeping love song singing of the great, deep love which God has for creation. Or we want an ecstatic happy dance of love delighting in all that our shared love is. But instead, we hear a song of love that did not go as planned. A broken-hearted song. A blue love song.

“Both Sides Now” by Joni Mitchell (beginning 🡪 1:45/first refrain) ((v. 2-4))

God had such high hopes. God found the perfect spot for God’s beloved. A green pasture. A fertile hill. God worked the ground until it was just right for planting – plowing, digging, removing stones. Then God put the best plants into the dirt. God kept watch over the plants, watering and pruning and making plans for the bumper crop that would undoubtedly spill forth, for after so much attention doing the right things day in and day out, there was no doubt that this garden would bear an abundant crop. But when the fruit came on the vine instead of producing a domesticated grape – sweet, thin-skinned, and growing in huge clusters easy to reach – the vines produced wild grapes – sour, thick-skinned, growing high on the vine, out of reach from the harvest, and all but inedible. God, the vineyard owner and planter was broken-hearted. “What more could I have done?” God asked in verse 4. I removed any threat it might have, but it was afflicted by a terrible blight. I planted with sweetness, but it grew to bitter. I planted with care and attention, but it grew to be out of control. What *more* could I have done???

There was nothing more God could have done. The vines simply grew away from the hand of their caretaker. Most gardeners don’t plant a garden for the sake of working a garden; gardeners plant and tend in hopes that a crop will come forth. They would not leave a plant in their garden that doesn’t bear produce. They would not leave a tomato plant with blight or beans with mites or moths. Gardeners pull out the bad plants to make room for productive plants. Even in the midst of the season, if something is weak or threatening to the other healthy plants, gardeners rebalance the soil and check for pests. All the while lifting prayers for what the healthy will grow to be, and saying choice words over the failing crop. Gardeners spend years and months and weeks hoping and leaning over the plants, earning sore backs and strong arms, waiting for the day when all will be ready.

God took the growing of God’s people personally. God loved them and tended to them. So that after having done everything right – (what more could I have done?!) – God was really angry at the way things finished. God was going to take away the vineyard’s protections. God stopped watering it and pruning it and let it go wild as it was wont to do – full of briers and thorns. Essentially, “You won’t accept my help? Try it your own way. I’m done with you.” What began as a tender love story moved from a blues song to an angry guitar-bashing blast.

“So What” by Pink (1:31 🡪 3:26) ((v. 5-6))

C.S. Lewis once said that “Anger is the fluid love bleeds when you cut it.” And here is a picture of God’s broken, bleeding heart crying out in anger against those chosen, holy people who disappointed him.

The passage ends without promises of grace or mercy. God left an exclamation mark on his disappointment. “The vineyard planted was Israel. The pleasant seeds planted were Judah. But where God expected justice, God saw bloodshed. Where God expected righteousness, God heard cries from those they oppressed.” (pause)

Loving relationships are filled with such hope. Whether brief or long-lasting covenantal loving relationships, hope is at the center of what brings people together. No matter how wonderful a relationship’s sparkling moments may be, no matter how much hope there was in the beginning, there are moments in our loving relationships when hopes come crashing down. Suddenly, the person we loved changed. *They* didn’t live into their promises. *We* didn’t live into our promises. The things we thought we *would* be will never be. The things we thought we would *do* can never be *done*… Is there still love? Can we still love? How do we still love?

“Both Sides Now” by Joni Mitchell (2:24 🡪 4:31) ((v.7))

Isaiah’s prophetic words are not easy to hear. God’s judgment is not easy to bear. Instead of ignoring God’s word – walking away in frustration or building walls around it to protect ourselves – however, we are called to more intentional, honest self-reflection. To hear these words and ask ourselves, “How has our life illustrated the truth we proclaim in worship? How have our lives borne sweet, abundant fruit in God’s vineyard? How has our life together at Sweet Hollow been faithful in following God each day? How might *we* (or I) disappointed God and broken God’s heart by not bearing the fruit God intended?”

God put us in a fertile field, watered us, and planted us with pleasant seeds. God loved us and tended us each step of the way. But then we became part of the problem. We fell away from God. We sin. We commit injustice. We abandon the orphan and oppress those in need. We do this every time we drive past the working poor and hope that someone else will feed them or give them medicine for today. We do this when we read news headlines about situations that clearly call out for action and intervention, yet we turn off our tvs, turn off our computers, and do nothing more than try to make *ourselves* feel better. We do this when we look for any and every reason *not* to get involved, offer sacrificial service, and be held accountable for our neighbors’ plight. Do we dare blame God for our faults? No! What more could God have done for us?

While we long to hear beautiful love songs, we must be ready to hear whatever song God sings – be it blues or lament or angry rock. Open your ears, O faithful people. Open your ears to hear God’s word and respond with faithful living, doing, and being. Amen.