

Daily Devotions

Monday October 9

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ²He dug 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; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 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. ⁶I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

For Reflection

This reading starts out full of hope and cheer: “Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard” (v. 1). Doesn’t that sound like everything will be sunny, fruitful, and wonderful? The landowner did everything he could to help the vineyard thrive. But what happened? Isaiah declares, “He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes” (v. 2). In other words, the fruit turned out to be really bad!

The prophet uses this story to diagnose the state of God’s people. God wanted them to act with justice and righteousness. He expected it from them. But they rebelled and failed to follow God’s will. This brief “love-song” from Isaiah isn’t the whole story, of course, but it is a powerful description of our human need for forgiveness when we fail to follow God’s ways. God cares for us, so why do we respond with selfishness and injustice?

We know that Jesus came to take away our sin and give us his righteousness through his death on the cross. His life, death, and

resurrection become God's ultimate love-song for us! This passage from Isaiah isn't easy to read as it points out our failures, but it helps us understand on a deep level how desperately we need Jesus to come to us. That understanding leads to gratitude for our salvation and for the grace we receive through Christ alone.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever spent time in a vineyard? Whether or not you've visited a vineyard in person, how do you picture acres of healthy and thriving vines that are ready for harvest? How does that image help you understand God's desire for you to have a full, abundant, peaceful, and fruitful life?
2. Have you ever had a realization about the truth of your sin or your need for God's forgiveness and grace? How did it change your approach to prayer or worship? How have you asked God to help you turn from your own sinful or selfish ways and turn toward God's ways for your life instead?

Read Psalm 50-52

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for farmers, students learning about agriculture, and those who work in parks and natural resources. Pray for an abundant harvest and for all people to have healthy food and clean air and water. Pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage people throughout the world to live as good and faithful stewards of the world God made.

Tuesday October 10

Read Psalm 53-55

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for students, teachers, and schools staff beginning a new academic year. Pray for God's wisdom and joy to fill all those who work with young people in schools, day care centers, and other youth activities. Ask God to bless Reformation's Kids' Inc. program and the work of our Growing Young Team, that we might touch the lives of the young people in our day care and our congregation with the love and hope of Jesus.

Wednesday October 11

Psalm 80:7-15

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁸You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.

¹⁰The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches;

¹¹it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River.

¹²Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

¹³The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.

¹⁴Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine,

¹⁵the stock that your right hand planted.

For Reflection

This is an audacious prayer. It will definitely challenge any notions we have of God as a kindly grandfather figure who always tells us we're wonderful and gives us whatever we want. This psalm is struggling for understanding how, if Israel is God's chosen people, set apart for his glory and for the redemption of the whole world, how can it be that foreign nations (Assyrians, Egyptians, Philistines, Babylonians, and more) can defeat and oppress them?

The author of this psalm takes a daring approach: God has permitted it. Indeed, the prophets even told that God would not only permit the defeat of Israel, but actively cause it! How can this be? For generations, Israel had been warned that its unfaithfulness to God's covenant would lead it to ruin. The Lord had created them as a people for his purposes, not for their own. But generation after generation, they turned away. They rejected the words of the prophets and the teachings of the Law. And finally, through the Assyrians and the Babylonians, destruction came.

We might recoil at this picture of God; but if we look at the teachings of Jesus, we certainly find him warning his disciples against rejecting

the Kingdom. If we stay with this line of thinking, we will find something deeper going on: the psalmist is convinced that if Israel's suffering comes from God, then God can also provide the cure. At its heart, the faith of the Old Testament is that the Lord's purpose is to be glorified in and through Israel. (For Christians, we see this fulfilled in Jesus.) Therefore, any "wrath" should be understood as purification more than punishment. And the wrath is never the end; there is always an expectation of mercy and restoration to come. If Israel's defeats are the result of chance, then perhaps those "chances" are beyond God's power to redeem.

So the psalmist's accusation against God actually creates a more profound hope, based in the Lord's purposes for Israel. Defeat is temporary, salvation will inevitably come. This hope comes to its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus. With Christ, we suffer. But a victory has already been won on that first Easter morning, and one day, that victory will be ours!

Questions for Reflection

1. Not all suffering comes as a consequence of sin. But, all suffering creates the opportunity for us to reflect on our own relationship with God. Trusting that salvation will come from God, how can you be more honest with yourself, God, and others about your own shortcomings? How can this lead you to experience the mercy of Christ more personally?
2. This psalm imagines Israel as a vine that benefits the world around it. This is a reminder that God created Israel not for their own benefit, but for the blessing and ultimately the salvation of the world. This is true for the Church as well. Is it possible that the struggles of the Church in our current day are because Christians have lost sight of this greater mission? If so, how can we repent and seek God's saving power again?

Read Psalm 56-58

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the ministry of Reformation Lutheran Church, that we would be devoted to serving God, bearing witness to the Gospel so that others may come to believe, and serving our community so that we may bless others.

Thursday October 12

Philippians 3:4b-14

^{4b}If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

For Reflection

I will focus on only one part of this incredibly rich and complex passage from Philippians, where Paul says, “this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” In Philippians, Paul holds a tension between salvation being completely God’s gift of grace in Christ and our need to “work out” our salvation. The result isn’t a compromise where it’s mostly God’s gift but we have to do what we can, or anything like that. Rather, the struggle against sin is a part of God’s gift. We would not even want to “strain forward” if the Gospel had not set us free from sin. Paul displays a very subtle and insightful understanding of the human soul. The great gift of Jesus, the new life his promises in this world and the next, captures our affections and draws us onward in faith. The Gospel doesn’t demand certain behaviors from us. Instead, the very promise of redemption, of a renewed mind, of a purified soul, changes our motivations from

within. Christians “strain forward” and “press on” not because Jesus demands that we do, but because we desire the great gifts Jesus has promised.

Questions for Reflection

1. Be honest: how much of a priority do you make of growing in your spiritual life? Where does it fall in terms of how much time, energy, and attention you give it? How does Paul’s vision of spiritual maturity being worth our striving challenge or change your priorities? Is there anything that can really give you more than you can find in a deepening relationship with God?

Read Psalm 59-61

Today’s Prayer Focus: Pray for the spiritual growth of yourself and all our members, that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, increase in our knowledge of God’s will, and overflow in love for each other and the world around us.

Friday October 13

Matthew 21:33-46

³³[Jesus said,] “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?’ ⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces;

and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

For Reflection

As we’ve heard in worship over the past couple of weeks, Jesus is on a roll telling parables in this section of Matthew. The parables are his way of answering the question posed to him by the chief priests and the elders of the people. They interrupted Jesus’ teaching in the temple to ask, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” (21:23).

Instead of answering their question directly, Jesus tells a series of parables to point out how the religious leaders are straying from God’s will and God’s ways. Jesus has God’s full authority of course. He is the Son of God. But instead of stating that directly, Jesus tells a parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard.

He masterfully builds the story so his challengers will become the ones to point out the tenants’ evil behavior and their failure to produce fruit for God’s kingdom. By the end of the parable, the Pharisees and chief priests “realized that he was speaking about them” (v. 45).

Unfortunately, that realization didn’t lead them to change their behavior or repent of their unfaithful ways. But for us, as readers and hearers, this parable gives us a chance to pause and ask ourselves if we’re serving God faithfully. Are we producing fruit for God’s kingdom, or have we gotten caught up in our own selfishness, greed, and desire for gain instead? Reflecting on this parable gives us a chance to reset our attitudes and actions as servants of God’s kingdom, so we can produce excellent fruit for the Lord.

Questions for Reflection

1. There are many examples of bad behavior and poor choices in this parable. What strikes you as the most outrageous, the most unexpected, or the most likely to lead to a terrible outcome? Why do you think that we, as humans, persist in making bad choices in all sorts of ways, choices that will end up with horrible consequences?
2. Re-read the Isaiah 5 passage from earlier this week. What parallels or similarities do you see between that story and Jesus’ parable about the landowner of the vineyard? If you were one of Jesus’

listeners and you knew the Isaiah 5 story in the back of your mind, how would that add more depth and urgency to hearing Jesus tell this parable?

3. How is Jesus the cornerstone of your life (see v.42)?

Read Psalm 62-64

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Ask God to sustain those who suffer under persecution for the name of Christ. Pray that all people would have freedom and good government.

Saturday October 14

Read Psalm 65-67

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for police, fire fighters, all emergency workers, health care workers, and those who serve in the military. Pray for farmers and those who transport food. Ask God to grant well-being to all in our community, and to stir up generosity to meet the needs of those who lack food, shelter, or other needs.

The Mission of Reformation Lutheran Church is to:

Invite our neighbors as Jesus invites us.

Engage in a community of graceful discipleship.

Equip our members to grow in faith and ministry.

Embody the love of Jesus in our world.