



October 7-9, 2023 -- Pentecost 19

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Give God Good Wine**

1. He's given us ideal conditions to grow                      2. He has no use for bad wine

Sermon Text: Isaiah 5: 1-7

***I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. 3 "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? 5 Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. 6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." 7 The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.***

In the name of the Triune God who is patient, loving, and kind, dear believers of Jesus,

Do you remember a time when Sunday dinner was a big deal? And because it was such a BIG deal, families would set out the fine China and cloth napkins for these special occasions. I mean, when is the last time you ate a meal at home with fine China and cloth napkins? And because only the best was brought out, families would often served wine with dinner – even the older kids would get a little taste in those tiny glasses. There's something special about wine. Most of us here probably don't taste wine very often unless we're talking about Holy Communion. On the other hand, in Europe, it's hard to have a sit down meal unless there's wine on the table.

Looking back at those special Sunday dinners, I can better appreciate the hard work of family and friends. They really did want to give their best. In a much greater way, God is the best. He's the best Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. And when we think about our role as his followers when we are in church and off campus, we want to give God our very best every day – our best behaviors, positive attitudes and joyful spirits. When we realize that God has made His home in our hearts in Holy Baptism, in a manner of speaking, and using an Old Testament reference in Isaiah, chapter 5, we want to give God good wine. We can give him good wine because he's given us the ideal conditions to grow. We want to give God good wine, because as our sermon reading reminds us, He has no use for bad wine.

Did you know that most of the domestic wine for sale in America comes from California? Even the wineries here in Minnesota get most of their grapes from the Golden State. Of course, fine wine comes from good grapes, and good grapes come from so-called: “winemaking country.” There has to be the right conditions for these grapes to grow: mild winters, the right pH balance in the soil, along with hot summers.

I’m using wine and grape comparisons because our sermon reading does. God compares His Old Testament people Israel to a valuable piece of real estate: a vineyard, a special place where fruit or grapes grow. And just listen to how God gave his chosen people ideal conditions to grow. Our sermon reading begins this way: ***My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.*** Of course, the Israelites took their winemaking seriously back in Bible times. Did you know God gave military service exemptions to Jewish men who had just planted a vineyard? That’s because it takes a lot of hard work to plant a vineyard, and it doesn’t produce any fruit until the fourth year. It’s important to show patience. But, in our sermon reading from Isaiah, chapter 5, God isn’t just giving us gardening advice. He’s showing us how patient he is with His people. God is the one who patiently worked to create a homeland for the Jews. He cleared out the pagan people from Canaan by battle after bloody battle. He gave them prime real estate. The Jewish spies described this land as “flowing with milk and honey”, where everything they planted grew. But, this vineyard needed protection because the country of Israel is located at the crossroads of three continents. Under the leadership of King David and his son King Solomon, the Jew had built a powerful kingdom. God fertilized his vineyard by giving His people countless spiritual blessings. I mean out of all the nations of the world, God picked the Jews to write down His holy Word and that the Savior would come from their bloodline.

So why did God go to all this trouble? I mean really, what did he have to gain? Not much. Our sermon reading calls Israel and Judah ***vines he delighted in***, literally a “garden of delight.” Some of us here can identify with having gardens. Christine and I planted a garden for the first time last year. Many of you have gardens and the table with fresh produce in the New Narthex is proof positive. So why do we break our backs, digging in the dirt, when we could just as well go to *Hyvee or Aldi* and pick up the produce in aisle number one? It’s because we enjoy watching things grow in our own backyard. In a similar way, God didn’t need anything from the Jews. He wasn’t lacking anything. Instead, God showered all these blessings on His people purely because of his grace, his undeserved love. Now one might expect his people to willingly respond to his love, with love in return, right? The prophet Isaiah did. He loved God. He says so in the opening words of our sermon reading: ***I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard.*** Isaiah got the message. Everything he had: his earthly life, his health, and his eternal soul sprouted from the fertile soil of God’s love. God’s love for Isaiah is what formed the good works and good wine in His heart.

But, God has done so much for us too. He has led us to this strip of land called Minnesota, to work, to live, to go to school, to retire, to enjoy the four seasons. He has

created ideal conditions for us to show our love back to him, also called good works, or good wine. From God himself, we enjoy freedom of religion in this state. We're not putting our lives on the line simply by gathering together for worship in this place. We enjoy economic freedom from God – we have more in our basements, garages and storage lockers than most of the world has in their life's savings. As members of the Wisconsin Synod, from God we enjoy freedom from false teaching that plagues most other church bodies. We don't hear our ministers, teachers or leaders arguing, if all the Bible is God's Word or if Jesus really rose from the dead? These are absolute truths and taught in our pulpits, classrooms, and meeting rooms every day. But, the greatest blessings we enjoy from God are the freedom from sin, death, and eternal damnation that comes only through Jesus Christ. Did we sin yesterday? Of course. But, do we dream about fire and brimstone? Do we wake up smelling burning sulfur? Hell is a real place made for real sinners, and that could include people like us, it should include people like us. But, we are NOT going to hell because God already sent his Son Jesus to suffer hell on the cross in our place. You could say, "God's love in Christ is the Miracle Grow for our faith." It's what keeps us coming back here to St. Paul's week after week to hear God's precious Word. His forgiveness picks us up after we've tripped over a temptation. His mercy washes away the stain of sin and sews up the tears in our soul and clothes us in perfect peace. Yes, under these ideal growing conditions, it's possible with the Holy Spirit for us to give God our fruits of faith, or let's call it, some good wine in return.

Wine is a special treat, but it can be rather expensive. Most of us would have a hard time spending more than \$10 or \$20 dollars for a bottle. But, some brands go for hundreds of dollars a bottle. Have you ever wondered why? Well, have you ever tasted a glass of good French or German wine? It's much smoother than most California brands. Imagine if you paid good money at a New Ulm restaurant for a glass of fine wine and it tasted like vinegar. UUUGGH – we'd want our money back. Wouldn't you expect God to have the same reaction, with our fruits of faith? In the similar way, because God has put so much into nurturing our faith, he is looking for us to produce more than 2-buck chuck, the absolute minimum. That's because He has no use for bad wine.

Isaiah continued the wine comparison this way: ***Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.*** Imagine God's disappointment. After all the work he put into his vineyard, all he got back was skunky wine. It's well documented how the Israelites mixed pagan worship with true worship and it gave a foul odor in God's nostrils. The Jewish kings traded away their spiritual heritage and the false prophets marketed it for profit to the people. Jerusalem was to Israel what New York city is to America today. After it rains, the air usually smells better. But, in New York, it tends to smell like wet dog. And our country's elite and broadcasters have embraced the false gods of money, entertainment, and pleasure – just think how that smells to God.

God waited a long time, a thousand years for his vineyard to produce good wine. You could say, he shows patience with his people, but finally that patience does run. Our

reading ends this way: **5 Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. 6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” 7 The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in.** Is God serious about this? Just look at history. Look how God withdrew his protection from the Jews, and they were carried off into exile by the Babylonians and later the Persian empire. God has no use for bad wine. The same thing will happen to our world one day. When God pours out this wrath on Judgement Day, it's going to make 9-11 and all the Hurricanes combined look like mosquito bites. Can you blame God? Of course not. My point is this, my Christian friends, rather than worrying about the rest of the world, how does our wine taste this week? How do the good things we do for God look? If the world ended today, what would God say about our priorities, our calendars, our checkbooks? Join me in saying: LORD have mercy. Forgive me for the sake of Jesus Christ. And then realize my Christian friends, it's not too late to give God good wine. As wine improves with age, so also our sorrowful souls will mellow when Christ's love fills them.

A well stocked wine cellar has a variety of wines, from a German sweet wine, to a dry French Chardonnay. Each bottle has it's own unique personality, it's own character, but they are all high quality. So God is looking for our good wine or good works to place in His collection. None of us have earned our way into that collection because of our personal sins. But, remember Christ's words to us His believers, even today. He said in John, chapter 15:16 **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.** God chose us for the same reason and helps us do great things for Him. Together, as St. Paul's Lutheran Church, as forgiven men, women, teens, and kids, let's ask God to help us every day, and give God good wine. For Jesus' sake, Amen.