

Message: “Faith vs. ?”

Our scripture readings for today have important messages for us all and the way we live. These are the kinds of passages that require reflection and study. If you read them and don’t understand what was going on at the time, then it’s very easy to come away with false readings. I’m going to go through them with you using modern language to help you see what God is telling us.

Isaiah sang a love song to God about a vineyard on fertile ground. They had everything going for them ... they were seen as good and pleasant in God’s eyes (Isaiah 1:9). (*We are the vineyard*)

Isaiah sang about the ways God tended and cared for that vineyard. God protected it with a fence and a watchtower. God weeded and hoed it, eliminating things that would take nourishment away and caring for the soil and plants. God made sure there was sun and rain, plenty of nourishment. God walked among the rows. (*God cares for us*)

God had expectations. That’s why God built a winepress.

God expected the vineyard to produce good fruit.

(*Spiritual fruit – peace, joy, kindness, etc.; making disciples, growing families, reconciling, peace and justice*)

Instead, the vineyard produced wild, sour grapes. Some versions saw rotten or bad fruit. (*the darkness of our spirit produces injustice, harm, selfishness, greed*) (Isaiah 5:1-3)

God invites US to decide:

“What more could God do?”

“When God expected good grapes,
why did God get bitter grapes?” (vv3-4)

All of us are the garden God was so proud of. God tends and cares for us. Yet the words of Isaiah are still true. We still produce sour grapes. God looks for a crop of justice and sees us murdering each other. God looks for a harvest of righteousness and hears only the moans of victims.

What are we to do?

Look to Jesus' words ... Jesus he uses an illustration about the weather to teach us that we should be able to figure out what he's saying and what needs to be done. All we have to do is look around.

Jesus says this: *"Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I've come to disrupt and confront!"*
(Luke 12:50)

What's up with that??

This is a message about Jesus' way of life.

The way isn't easy.

It doesn't guarantee a safe, comfortable life.

The way doesn't promise material things – more stuff. It doesn't promise power or relevance or a reserved parking space. It doesn't even promise a home, a job or good health.

The way will make people unhappy with you,
even those in your home

Yes, that includes your family and friends.

Living Jesus' way means living a life of RADICAL LOVE.

That's love so radical that you will go out of your way to love your enemies. It's love that sacrifices for others, which means you don't do things for others so you'll benefit. It's love that says, "How may I help you?" rather than putting the burden on the other to ask.

Jesus wants YOU to decide:

Will you follow me or not? If yes, then act like it. (v57)

Living the way Jesus taught us requires commitment and courage.

It requires faith. Most of all, it requires an all-consuming, all-encompassing, life-giving, life-changing LOVE.

The best news: we aren't alone. If you're willing to walk the path, God will be with you every step of the way. God the Creator will go before you. Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, is with you. The Holy Spirit will live inside you, working through you. God is still tending and caring for you.

That's because we're the ones who bear fruit in the world. We're the ones who show love to others, even when people don't agree or understand why we do so. We're the ones who care for others, no matter what they've done – real or perceived. We're the ones who care for creation, no matter whether others understand why or not. We're the ones who gather to pray, study the Bible, worship God, care for one another and then take what we know and do it for those who make fun of us – with a smile and a pat on the back. We choose to live lives of generosity and joy, not scarcity and fear.

We're the ones who give without concern for return. We freely share what we are given without putting strings or obligations on our gifts.

The path to real life – eternal life, isn't narrow because God doesn't want very many people to walk it. There's a planet-wide freeway leading to Jesus, who is the shepherd, the one who shows us the way.

The path is narrow because so few people are willing to sacrifice their pride and ego to follow Jesus. Radical love is only possible when we live first for Jesus, then for our family and friends, then for others. Don't worry, God will care for you.

Anyone is welcome to our church, our spiritual home. God puts no limits on who can walk in the door and participate.

Membership comes with expectations.

Leadership raises the bar.

God calls us all to be servant leaders. We serve where God has placed us: at home, work and school or in the community, locally, nationally and abroad. Let's remember God's expectations.

Living Jesus' way comes with great benefits:

God listens to you and does what you ask.

Two words: eternal life.

God will bless you and your family to 1000 generations (Ps. 105:7-9).

Love is stronger than anything.

With love, you'll always have faith and hope.

Isaiah reminds us of the ramifications of walking away from God:

God can't protect us as well.

We aren't listening, so God can't guide us.

God's Spirit can't nourish us.

We get choked by the worries, anxieties
and frustrations of the world.

So I invite you to live by three simple rules. Teach them to others,
especially your children:

Do no harm.

Do good.

Stay in love with God.

Jesus asks you to decide:

Will you follow me or not?

It's your choice.

Let us pray ...

Lord, thank you for being a God who pardons and heals us because you love us. Forgive us, Lord, for our blindness and deafness. We do not see the bias in our lives or the way others are mistreated. We do not trust the stories of those who have seen. We have to be shown the marks in your hand and the hole in your side even to believe in you. Show us the way to live lives filled with radical love. Send us leaders who will guide us to become a community of grace and mercy, not a house divided and anxious in fear. Make us to be those who are generous in our living and carefree in our loving. And, through our service, may we become your agents of peace and justice. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 5:1-7 (CEB)

Let me sing for my loved one
a love song for his vineyard.

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

He dug it,
cleared away its stones,
planted it with excellent vines,
built a tower inside it,
and dug out a wine vat in it.

He expected it to grow good grapes -
but it grew rotten grapes.

So now, you who live in Jerusalem, you people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard:

What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I haven't done for it?

When I expected it to grow good grapes,
why did it grow rotten grapes?

Now let me tell you what I'm doing to my vineyard.

I'm removing its hedge,
so it will be destroyed.

I'm breaking down its walls,
so it will be trampled.

I'll turn it into a ruin;
it won't be pruned or hoed,
and thorns and thistles will grow up.

I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

The vineyard of the LORD of heavenly forces is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are the plantings in which God delighted.

God expected justice, but there was bloodshed;
righteousness, but there was a cry of distress!

Luke 12:49-56 (CEB)

[Jesus said] “I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze! I have a baptism I must experience. How I am distressed until it’s completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division. From now on, a household of five will be divided - three against two and two against three. Father will square off against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Jesus also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud forming in the west, you immediately say, ‘It’s going to rain.’ And indeed it does. And when a south wind blows, you say, ‘A heat wave is coming.’ And it does. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret the present time?”