

Worship Resources - *Bearing Fruit* - <https://youtu.be/encMQjZdh5o>

18th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

4th October, 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7 CEV / Matthew 21:33-46 CEV

Intro/Prelude

Shout To The Lord,

Words and Music by Darlene Zschech,
played by church musician Annie Center

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Our tradition at Olympic View is to begin our service greeting and wishing each other peace. Every October, people from our church participate in the CROP Walk to raise money to combat hunger and food instability around the globe. This morning I'm sharing a video of the tremendous impact just providing one pig can make to a family working hard to try to make ends meet. If you'd like to contribute to our effort, or join us in walking socially distantly, or virtually, there will be a link in the video description to our team. You can also find out more on our website, www.olympicchurch.org

Reflection video *CROP Hunger Walk*

Raising Animals; Growing Communities

<https://resources.crophungerwalk.org/resources/videos/>

Invocation

Most Gracious God
we greet you once again in this sacred space.

We have come because we need to be reminded
of your love and your expectations for our living.

We are like the vine you planted, watered and protected.
We know in our hearts
that we need, want and desire your presence in our lives.

So we come in prayer
and listen for your Word to speak to our hearts
and reveal again your desires for us. **Amen.**

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. Amen.

In our reading from the prophet Isaiah this morning, God is presented as a vineyard owner who planted a wonderful crop, the nation of Israel, only to have wild grapes grow in its place. As we listen to these words, let's reflect on what kind of crops we raise in God's vineyard today. Are we producing good fruit?

Words of the Prophet Isaiah 5:1-7 CEV

I will sing a song about my friend's vineyard that was on the side of a fertile hill.

My friend dug the ground, removed the stones, and planted the best vines. He built a watchtower and dug a pit in rocky ground for pressing the grapes. He hoped they would be sweet, but bitter grapes were all it produced.

Listen, people of Jerusalem and of Judah! You be the judge of me and my vineyard.

What more could I have done for my vineyard? I hoped for sweet grapes, but bitter grapes were all that grew.

Now I will let you know what I am going to do. I will cut down the hedge and tear down the wall. My vineyard will be trampled and left in ruins.

It will turn into a desert, neither pruned nor hoed; it will be covered with thorns and briars. I will command the clouds not to send rain.

I am the Lord All-Powerful! Israel is the vineyard, and Judah is the garden I tended with care. I had hoped for honesty and for justice, but dishonesty and cries for mercy were all I found.

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we continue to remember the family of our dear Grace Edmark, who passed away last week.

We are thankful for the uneventful, safe travel of Roger and Kathy back from Japan, as well as Haile and Nancy returning from Nebraska.

We continue to pray for those continuing to be affected by fires and natural disasters, and those who seek to give them relief.

Finally, we pray for peace, compassion, and justice to prevail in a world that often seems to be coming apart at the seams.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy Friend, health of the sick, comfort of the sad, rebuke of the oppressor, judge of the greedy, hope of the repentant, friend of the downtrodden;
in prayer we lift up to you this world with its outrageous injustices yet also its outpouring of human kindness from ordinary people.

Loving God, let your blessing be upon those who serve their neighbours without thought of reward, who forgive their enemies seventy times seven, who care for broken strangers as if they were dearest friends, who weep with the bereaved as if they were sisters, who heal the diseased not counting the risk to themselves

Let your blessing encourage those who work for peace when the only result seems to be more violence, who preach and live the Gospel in the face of persecution, who feed the hungry although their efforts get misinterpreted, and who stand up for the downtrodden in spite of public scorn.

Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered here now, that our faith may be enlarged and fortified, our vision enlightened and extended, and our compassion refreshed and widened.

Through Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was good enough for the simple, too much for the proud and powerful, and absolutely amazing for all who shared his cup.

Amen!

Our gospel lesson this morning tells a different vineyard story. As we listen to Jesus retell the vineyard story from Isaiah for the temple authorities of his time, let's think how we care for the crops we've been given, and how we treat those God sends our way. What fruit do we bear?

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 21:33-46 CEV

Jesus told the chief priests and leaders to listen to this story:

A land owner once planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it and dug a pit to crush the grapes in. He also built a lookout tower. Then he rented out his vineyard and left the country.

When it was harvest time, the owner sent some servants to get his share of the grapes.

But the renters grabbed those servants. They beat up one, killed one, and stoned one of them to death.

He then sent more servants than he did the first time. But the renters treated them in the same way.

Finally, the owner sent his own son to the renters, because he thought they would respect him.

But when they saw the man's son, they said, "Someday he will own the vineyard. Let's kill him! Then we can have it all for ourselves."

So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Jesus asked, "When the owner of that vineyard comes, what do you suppose he will do to those renters?"

The chief priests and leaders answered, "He will kill them in some horrible way. Then he will rent out his vineyard to people who will give him his share of grapes at harvest time."

Jesus replied, "You surely know that the Scriptures say, 'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all. This is something the Lord has done, and it is amazing to us.'

I tell you that God's kingdom will be taken from you and given to people who will do what he demands.

Anyone who stumbles over this stone will be crushed, and anyone it falls on will be smashed to pieces."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard these stories, they knew that Jesus was talking about them.

So they looked for a way to arrest Jesus. But they were afraid to, because the people thought he was a prophet.

Scripture Video **Matthew 21:33-46 - *Tenants Of A Vineyard***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StxUXLBJ86w>

Message – *Bearing Fruit*

Fall is definitely in the air. While the last week or so has been a little bit of leftover summer, the telltale signs are there: the leaves are starting to fall, there's a crispness to the evening air, and storms and rain have made their first appearance. The change of seasons means getting out those comfy sweaters and jeans, and putting away the shorts and summer wear until next year. For those of us who are not big shoe fans, now we have to actually wear socks, and bid a sad farewell to the flip flops and sandals of warmer weather.

The end of summer has always been a significant time for people throughout the ages. It's the time of the final harvest of the growing season in most places; the time when the last crops are gathered and the plants prepared to go dormant for the winter. It's a time to celebrate the rewards of months of hard labor in tilling, planting, and caring for one's precious crops. Particularly in the hilly, rocky, thin soil of the Near East in Palestine, this would entail clearing the ground of tons of small stones, and building terraces to hold one's crops. Many of our human festivals and religious observances throughout the ages have coincided with this period of harvest and transition.

Both of our scriptures this week reference this imagery of a vineyard and the harvest. In that part of the world in ancient times, much of the work of farming was performed by tenant farmers, people hired by the landowner to do the hard work of making the land productive. In return, they would be allowed a portion of the crops produced, while the rest would be given to the owner. The more one was able to keep for oneself, naturally the more well-off one would be. Likewise, the better, more productive crops one raised, the greater the reward. In an ideal world, this arrangement would benefit both parties. The tenant farmers would be blessed with a secure place to live, with a guaranteed source of income to provide for their needs, and the landowner would receive an income from his land holdings to also sustain the needs of himself and his family. However, as is usually the case, the ideal is rarely the reality when dealing with humans and human imperfections.

Greed and self-interest are certainly nothing new; they've been a part of us since day one. When one side or the other does not care for the well-being of the other, the system fails to benefit both. Both of our scriptures today make use of allegory to

make this point. They use this vineyard imagery to symbolize the relationship of God to the people, and how that relationship sours when the proverbial vineyard is not managed properly. In Isaiah, God prepares the perfect vineyard to produce a good crop, cleared of stones, planted with choice vines, and protected by a strong defensive hedge with a watchtower. Yet when it comes time for the harvest, instead of premium fruit, it yields wild sour grapes that have little value. The human grapes God expected would demonstrate justice, but instead brought bloodshed, would show righteousness, but instead led to cries of lament.

God responds to this bad crop management with the promise to remove the protections and favorable conditions that have allowed the vineyard to thrive, and let it wither as one does with failed crops. Jesus builds on this imagery in his parable in our gospel reading. In his story, the crops were successful, yet the problem lies with the tenants. When the time comes to share the fruits of their labor with the landowner, they greedily keep everything for themselves, killing off each set of messengers sent by the landowner, including the landowner's own son. Like the first story, this one is also rife with symbolism. The landowner again is God. However, this time, Jesus is engaging in debate with the temple authorities who are challenging his authority. He tricks them into filling in the ending of the story with a vengeful retribution towards the tenants by the landowner. After falling into this trap, they realize that the tenants in his story are themselves. They see God giving them the authority to care for the people, yet they use this gift for their own ends, and when God sends them messengers, prophets, they shun or destroy them in favor of their own self-interests, even condemning God's chosen messenger, the Messiah.

Clearly these scriptures are full of meaning on several levels, but today I'd like to focus on how we bear fruit in the context of our own vineyard today. Like the priests of Jesus' day, God has provided a vineyard for us to manage. What are the fruits of our labor? When we think of the church, what is it that comes to mind? Is it a vibrant, verdant field of new growth and possibilities, constantly open to the new revelations that God's modern messengers bring, or is it an institution that seeks to conserve accumulated dogma, and maintain the reigning social order that sustains it regardless of the potential injustice of that system? Unfortunately, too often our minds are made up about the grasp we have on truth. We come to this parable knowing we know God through Jesus Christ, and we have spent centuries honing the fine details of that relationship through study of every nuance of scripture and the doctrines developed. We anticipate what God will say to us based on what God has already said to us; no less than those who have gone before us, we have mistaken certainty for faith in the living God.

We seek God in prayer certainly, but often we view divine revelation as ending with the biblical canon, limits imposed by human design. How much are we like those tenants in Jesus' parable? How much do we focus on numbers in the pews, the size of church finances, and the building? What fruit does that produce? To quote our sisters and brothers in the United Church of Christ, "God is still speaking." We may have chosen to focus on a set list of ancient texts for revelation, and they can be informative, but God never works by our rules. The landowner still sends messengers to us. They may not look like the prophets we expect, but prophets they still are: the homeless that camp out at our door, those who struggle with addiction in our midst, people in our community who struggle against racial discrimination and injustice, those in our midst whose sexual or gender identities that often lead to them being outcast and unaccepted in God's vineyard.

There's a story of a time before refrigerators, when people used ice houses to preserve their food. Ice houses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the ice houses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer. One man lost a valuable watch while working in an ice house. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the ice house during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

Often the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough, and quiet enough, to hear. Do we really listen to hear God speak? Do we recognize the messengers God sends us? We often lament the dwindling size of our churches and the smaller and smaller gatherings for worship. The question we need to ask ourselves is what is the fruit we are producing? Is it nourishing and what those who hunger seek and need? Or is it what we find comforting and familiar? Like the tenants in our gospel story today, we have a choice. We can embrace and welcome those messengers sent by God and the revelation they bring, or we can choose to turn away and stay in our own comfortable bubble. But what if God is outside the bubble? What kind of fruit can we produce on our own? I hope and pray we can turn our attention outwards, and seek to find God still speaking and at work around us in this time, in this place, recognizing that revelation is not just a book written 2000 years ago, but an ongoing event from a God whose work is never done. **Amen.**

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, let's listen to the following prayer written by John van de Laar, and give some thought to how those words and sentiments might apply to our own lives, and how we might choose to do things differently. We will end our prayer by offering thanks for the blessings we've been given.

Reflection Prayer

How many times each day do You come to me, Jesus? How many quiet prophets, how many whispered warnings are sent to catch my attention?

And how many times do I pass by unaware of Your calm Presence, unfeeling of Your beckoning gaze?

How often have I shunned Your messengers; sending them away with clipped words and cold eyes? How often have I hurt the agents of Your care; too busy or self-absorbed to notice Your invitation in their words?

Forgive me, Lord, when through neglect, pre-occupation or wrongfulness, I turn my back on You. Teach me to see, to listen and to walk with an open heart, so that I can welcome You, and answer You, when, in grace and love, You call me to follow.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, you have given so much to us, and we have offered back such small amounts in return. We have often served you as part-time followers, giving a fraction of our time and resources to your mission and an overwhelming share to our own indulgences. We strive to do better, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead – pressing on to the goal of serving Christ with all our being. In his name, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The Creator knows you, for God made you. The Creator knows your heart, your mind, your body, your soul. The Creator knows that you are more than what others suspect. You are more than what others interpret. You are more than what can be perceived. You are made in the image of God, and you are beloved. You are created with the intention to love and care for others and the world. Live into your intention. Seek forgiveness, and know you are forgiven. Seek to repair what is broken, and know that God is at work repairing your heart and soul. Seek to love one another, and know that you are God's beloved, and with you, God is well pleased.

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude

Love Will Be Our Home,

Words and music by Steven Curtis Chapman,
performed by church musician Annie Center,
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zn8FD_tDLw8&list=PLHsQsQyuMWX0wJySZuaCsQT3udM2LX-&index=18