

Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 12:49-56

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I came across a few articles online this week that had to do with how people were living out their faith, or what kind of witness they were being. A couple of articles concerned a well known author: "Anne Rice Leaves Christianity but Remains Faithful to Christ"; and also about Anne Rice, "Today I quit being a Christian." And then I came across another article "The Slow, Whining Death of British Christianity" and in that one the author was talking about how the British government supports the Church of England through taxes and special privileges, and how he feels that they shouldn't be doing that. Basically these articles were about Christians not acting in a Christian manor. They were talking about humans abusing their positions, abusing each other. These articles were about faith, Christianity, humanism, and right versus wrong. They exposed believers, Christians, for the human beings that we are: Hypocrites and egotists, self-absorbed and attention seeking; which is really not all that different than what's going on in our first lesson.

The prophet Isaiah is preaching to the people of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah at a time when things were relatively peaceful (but all things are relative, aren't they?) It's a time of prosperity, at least for the upper class, maybe for some of those in the middle class. If you were here last week you might remember from that reading, they've got the burnt offerings down pat, they know how to burn up those cows and rams and all sorts of critters. Yet, in the midst of all of their SHOW, they really aren't FOLLOWING GOD. So Isaiah poses to them a parable about a vineyard, something to which the people are able to relate:

There's this guy who plants a vineyard. He uses good choice vines, not the sour wild grape vines. He plants in fertile soil at the top of the hill where it is sure to get plenty of sunlight AND plenty of rain. He's cleared out the stones, and he's used the stones to make a watchtower right in the middle of the vineyard so that he can keep an eye out for thieves or critters or fires. He takes care of the vineyard using the best fertilizer he can find, and yet when he goes to harvest the grapes he doesn't get those good juicy sweet grapes to make wine, instead the vines, despite all of his labor and Love have produced those small sour Wild grapes.

What should this vineyard owner do, asks Isaiah? Well the answer from the people is unanimous, let's tear the vineyard out, start all over again, lay waste to everything that has not produced, pull them out, pluck them up, trample them underfoot, that's the answer that the people give to Isaiah. To which, Isaiah then responds, YOU are the wild grapes, and the vineyard owner is the Lord God.

The people through their lack of care for others, specifically for those less fortunate, or their lack of care for the widows, their lack of care for the orphans, their lack of care for the poor, by their non-action, they have been disrespectful not only to their own kinsman, their own countryman, but more importantly they have been disrespectful to the Lord. And God is tired of this lack of respect, this neglect. And the Lord through Isaiah is calling the people to repent, to return, to stop running away. God knows the people aren't perfect. God knows people make mistakes. God wants them to own up to the mistakes they had made, to take responsibility for their own actions, to look after each other. All the while knowing that there will indeed be strife, still the Lord God calls them to be faithful.

Seven hundred and forty years later Jesus is still talking about the same thing. Faithfulness. And the audience that Jesus addresses in the gospel lesson, he tells them exactly how faith is going to divide families and bring about separation. As we heard it read tonight, ⁵¹ *Do you think that I come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, rather division!* ⁵² *From now on five in a household will be divided, three against two and two against three;* ⁵³ *they will be divided: father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

We get what could be construed as conflicting messages throughout scripture. In the Old Testament in the Book of Genesis, God calls to Abram and Sari and God tells them that they are going to go to the land which is flowing with milk and honey. Little while later on in the Book of the Prophet of Isaiah, Isaiah will talk about the time when lambs will live together with wolves and lions will not eat anyone. Jesus, himself, in the gospels talks about a time about his yoke is easy and the burden is light, and yet, all of these are referring NOT to our present reality, but to the Kingdom of God. To the time when God will reign supreme and we won't have all of our human division. It's not the world as we know it. It is not the world with all of our imperfections and sins that get in the way and mess up things, cause that is what our life is like, isn't it? We tend to get this whole concept of "faith" wrong from the beginning. And then, even when we are *striving* to do the right thing, Jesus himself tells us we're going to muck it up, at least on the sides of relationships.

So why should we even bother? If we know that we're going to get things wrong, if we can't ever be good enough, why should we even try? Well, I would say, to agree with Pastor Michael Bingenheimer, as he noted in the journal called *Homiletics* (Ascension Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas):

"God still called (the people) 'loved' even though God has these complaints against them. God was not giving up on them, God's desire was for them to repent and return. God knows that our daily lives don't always reflect justice and righteousness, God doesn't give up on us either, but wants us to come with repent hearts so that we might be fruitful. For only God has the power to remove the wildness

of sin from our hearts so that we can be productive people in God's eternal kingdom."

As believers, we are called to help folks in need. Especially, people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Sometimes, it's an easy thing to do, to find someone to whom we are drawn, somebody in need, someone for whom we feel empathy. But, we're called, to help the folks as well that we *don't* get along with. Folks who might have obvious communication problems, people who might be living on the streets, the rejects of society. Helping those people might cause strife within our own families, within our congregation. Reaching out to those "wild grapes" might get ourselves ostracized from those who consider themselves the "true" grapes.

Yet if we continue to read in Isaiah, we discover that there will be reconciliation between the people and God. That's faith. Faith to believe in the things that we do not see; the things that we cannot fully comprehend. Faith is there for us. We have to be careful that we don't become like the people in Isaiah's day, so busy trying to show our faith that we're not really faithful in our hearts. We are called to be faith **filled** and then to go forth and act on that faith in all that we do.

Amen.