

Cycle of Blessings- Currency of Relations #2  
Isaiah 5:1-7 and Luke 12:49-56

Music remains one of the most poignant ways in which to express love. Among the love songs I enjoy include "My Funny Valentine"; "Bridge over Troubled Water; You Are the Sunshine of My Life; The Way We Were; Moon River and Love Theme from Romeo and Juliet" to name a few. Unlike many interesting "valentine songs," prophet Isaiah recomposes the love song into a lament over the nation's betrayal of God's principles. In this passage we have a glimpse of God's inward emotional frustration at the detestable fruits of Divine labor.

Isaiah plays on the genre of a love song, using the marriage motif to describe the relationship between God and Israel. The land is fertile, with great possibilities for the development. The stones were removed; only the finest qualities of vines were planted. The owner is very fond of his vineyard, works hard on its behalf, and has only the best intentions for its future. In preparation for the harvesting and processing of the grapes a watch tower was built in the middle. As with all farmers, the owner has high expectations for the vines, but to his disappointment it was the contrary.

The problem that Isaiah finds in Judah is the same as Hosea found in Israel in last week's reading. The people have forgotten about God. They have started to worship false idols and gods like fear, money, and power. Others continue to worship the Lord, but they don't allow their faith to affect their daily lives. In agreement with New Testament perspectives, this text expresses relationship with God as transformation of the person and the community of which they are a part, transformation as growth directing life in a new direction that moves outward from self to a concern with others. The "fruit" of relationship with God always becomes bitter if it is concerned more with how that relationship affects personal interests than it is with how that relationship with God transforms relationships with others.

A previous Gospel reading (from Luke 12:32-40) left us with Jesus' assuring words: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." This week's reading from Luke 12 seems to give Jesus' followers lots of reasons to be afraid: I didn't come to bring peace, but I came to bring division within your family. For there will be son set against father, and mother against daughter. I will set daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. For whoever loves his mother or father or brother or sister or friend or relative more than me; whoever loves his job and home and fireplace more than me cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Certainly the earliest Christians knew that following Jesus would likely mean saying good bye to the "peaceful" status quo of their lives - especially when (as was often the case) it meant leaving their families, the source of their meaning and economic survival. Barnes' commentary on the Bible, suggests that the result of Christ's coming will be that there will be divisions and contentions. He does not mean that he came "for" that purpose, or that he "sought" and "desired" it; but that such was the state of the human

heart, and such the opposition of people to the truth, that that would be the "effect" of his coming.

While Christians in some parts of the world -- one thinks of India, China, and parts of Africa -- continue to face opposition, Christians in the western world are asked to give up very little for the sake of their faith. How, then, do we hear Jesus' pronouncement that he brings fire and division rather than peace? Our value is in being a part of the vine that is the body of Christ. The wood of the branch is useless. Ezekiel pointed out that one cannot even make a tent peg out of it. The fire it would create is of no value. The branch is useless unless it bears fruit.

Let us talk about what it means to give our total commitment to Jesus Christ. What does that mean in this twenty-first century when terrorists give their total commitment to a cause and wear bombs and blow themselves up for their cause? What does total commitment to Jesus Christ mean when terrorists clearly embrace their cause more than their love for their family, friends and even their own life? Martin Luther King Jr. in *The Strength to Love* tells of a particular tension packed week that included arrest and threats on his life. He spoke at a mass meeting which at the end of the meeting a woman came to him in front of the church and said, "Something is wrong with you. You didn't talk strong tonight." "Oh, nothing is wrong," replied King. "Now, you can't fool me. I done told you. We are with you all the way. And even if we aren't with you, God's gonna take care of you." When we abide in Christ, we find the strength of community.

Have we given as much attention to the health of the church as we have to our golf score? Have we given as much attention to the maintenance of our spiritual disciplines as to the maintenance schedule for our car? Where in the scale of our attention to detail does our devotion to the teachings of our Lord rank? Vital connection is at the heart of what Jesus was talking about in this passage on the vine and the branches. Jesus is teaching on what it takes to be vitally connected to God and consequently to each other in ways that bring life and health.

The vineyard of Christ's church produces fruit only when the church is in complete dependence on the vine. Christ the Lord calls us this morning to renew our commitment to His revelation, our commitment as covenant husbands, as faithful mothers, obedient children, and fruitful heirs of the covenant of grace. We are called to the faith to be a part of a larger community, a family created by those who abide in Christ. Joined together by our shared love for him, challenged together to bear fruit for that love in the world, we are connected together in and through him.

The good news for us is that God is not just the refiner by the fire—the one who places us into the fire—but God is the fire. God is right there with us in the searing heat of the flames, burning with us until all is made pure. There is a scripture from 2 Timothy (1:6) that says “fan into flame the gift of God that is in you.” Our God, who is fire, yearns for his story to come blazing to life in us, and for our lives to reveal the beautiful, precious, and loving vision of God.