

In the Garden

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

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. 2He 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. 3Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4What 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? 5Now 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.” 7The 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.

Old Isaiah had a farm-

EIEIO

And on his farm he had some

Time Talents and Treasure!

EIEIO

With a tik tok here and a LA LA there, here a ching there a ching
everywhere a ching ching!

Old Isaiah had a farm, EIEIOOOOOO!

Through the prophet we hear that God is not happy with the garden that Isaiah has been tending. It began with such hope, such care; so many things going for it! There was fertile soil, and good vines planted. God even builds a vat to collect the fruit from the garden in anticipation of making some delicious wine! God is preparing to celebrate the harvest of this garden. Our Lord comes back to check on things and discovers that things have gone astray. Folks have allowed weeds to grow. They have made it possible for sour grapes to thrive and the result will be a spoiled crop in the vineyard (or garden) of the Lord. It is a disaster.

I come to you today with *good news* about the vineyard we have here at BCC! On this Sunday before we come to plant our next season of

generosity, I am encouraged by the time, talent and treasure I have witnessed.

For those of you who reap the sweetness of their labor, I'd like to tell you about the time and talent that our members put into tending the treasure you have supplied to this endeavor.

Over the past couple of years I have been here I have seen how our Board of Deacons and Faith Formation/CE have worked to spark the imaginations of those who would worship here. They have provided creative and challenging worship experiences during the high holy seasons of Advent and Lent. We have gathered for Blue Christmas and new pageants and Musical expressions of Jesus' love. They have offered Bible studies and passover dinners, Heifer fairs and Sunday School to inspire God's children of all ages to see beyond their own immediate understandings of the world. With Fimi and the choir, the Caring Committee, Women's Society, Fellowship and, Flower committee, they have taken advantage of the fertile soil our congregation brings to bear on the garden and these people have worked with God to clear the stumbling stones from our little plot of heaven, so that the vines that are planted have the best ground to grow in. They are working the soil with God each and every day!

To protect that soil and the plants that are growing, we have appointed our Trustees to build a wall and a watchtower. Month after month these folks pour over financial records and hold them up to the mission of the church. They manage and steward the financial resources of our

congregation so that in any season we will be able to provide the resources God's garden needs to grow! Those resources pour out of watering cans and hoses in the form of your pledges and loose plate offerings, stocks and bonds that have been left to us by those who saw a long term yield coming from this community of faith, and from endowments who wanted the garden to grow long after they had entered into eternal communion with Jesus! I try to attend most of the Trustee's meetings and I am regularly encouraged by the care they give to each dollar and each resource our church puts toward ministry. I'll admit that a lot of talk usually focuses on the relatively mundane work of property upkeep, but as Isaiah notes, without the walls, the garden falls apart!

I was most impressed this year as the Trustees began talking about caring for the human resources our congregation calls upon. Part of that conversation resulted in the ADA ramp that work has begun on. The Trustees saw it as an opportunity to help more people access this garden that we have been given. And, I am encouraged by the Trustees vision of tending to those on our staff who have lower base salaries. Our Trustees recognize that without those workers in the garden the daily detritus of dust, dirt, and robo calls would eat away at God's potential harvest like so many leaf hoppers or black rot fungus.

The Trustees are measured guardians of our garden here at BCC. Working alongside of the members of our property committee (who do a lot of the heavy lifting of weeding the garden and tending its walls) I have

seen their constant care and I want you to know about it as you prepare to plant your seeds of generosity.

In today's reading, God complains about the wild grapes that have entered the garden. Isaiah describes the scene where God comes looking for sweet fruit and finds bitterness instead:

7The 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.

Surely there are places outside of our section of the garden that are filled with bloodshed and injustice. The shootings we read about, the machinations of politics, the plight of our immigrant sisters and brothers; God comes looking for righteousness, but hears cries of distress.

Our Benevolence committee is working hard to address those cries beyond our walls. They are the vat that presses our fruit and allows it to ferment into a wonderful elixir that swells the soul! They have activated us to walk for our spiritual siblings who live with hunger insecurity. They have called us to the challenge of providing shelter for our sisters and brothers who are homeless through the winter. They have helped us share our resources with folks who are seeking to learn more about God's world through higher education.

This year, the committee has begun something new. This year our Benevolence committee has undertaken to form relationships with the folks we are helping. Instead of simply writing a check to a faceless

organization, they are seeking human contact and understanding with the people and organizations we support. They are trying to interpret those connections to the wider congregation so that we have a richer awareness of our relationship to the fruit that grows outside of these walls. So you'll see by the Giving Tree a personal description of the people we are providing gift cards or toys to. During the Christmas break, the committee will meet with students who have received scholarships so that we can strengthen the relationships we have with these remarkable young people. Next week you will hear from someone who works at Neighbors Link so that you can put a face to the mission beyond the little insert in today's bulletin.

I come to the garden with Good News today, sisters and brothers! By tending to all these things, by planting our seeds of generosity in the midst of this garden, we diversify the interest and strengthen the yield of faith to the glory of our Lord.

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines.

As you think about what you'll plant next week in the form of your pledge to BCC, imagine what you'd like to see grow here. Invest in that crop and be involved with your time and talent tending to the garden we've been given. Trust that those who you have called to tend the garden are doing likewise with your gifts, employing all of their faith and attention.

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:

I have hope that come harvest this time next year, the vats will be full of the sweet fruit of the spirit because of the generosity I have seen here at BCC working side by side with the nurturing love of our God of great vision!

I have faith that you will join me next week (if you haven't already done it!) in planting your choicest vines within these walls, to Jesus' glory.
Amen.