


“Signs of the Times”
Sunday, August 14, 2016
12th Sunday after Pentecost

 **(Isaiah 5:1-7, NRSV)**

[Read from the Wesley Study Bible]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

First, let's put some context around this ***“love song”*** that seems to be anything but.

Isaiah is speaking to a nation at war in 734 B.C.E.

He understands all political success or failure to be directly linked to the moral condition of the society.

So, this passage lays out a beautiful plan God had in mind for the people he loves.

As so often happens in God's dealings with humans, the plan goes awry.

There is rampant government corruption; the rich and powerful continue to gain ground at the expense of an ever-widening gap between them and the common folk.

There is no justice as a bribe easily acquits the guilty and robs the innocent of their rights.

There is widespread confusion, disillusionment, and despair.

Isaiah uses a parable here to show the people that God had such a great idea, such love for his people, but they messed it up by bad behavior and selfish choices.

Every one of us is familiar with disappointed expectations.

We've all made great plans that fell apart in the end.

Our ability to overcome our disappointments has always depended on our response to them.

Isaiah tells us, even now, that God is disappointed.

The signs of the times lead us to areas where we have failed to produce the sweet, nourishing fruit that God planted in the vineyard.

So, what do we do now?

How can we turn this back into God's love song?

Let us pray...Gather us to you, O Lord, and help us to hear your word this morning. Let us hear the love within the challenge; help us find the hope you bring. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

This morning we have seen two wonderful examples of the hope God gives to the world.

1. **Our young people**, *our children and grandchildren*, represent joy and everything that is good in the world.

God has given us these precious lives and asked us to tend them, feed them, and nurture them.

Proverbs 22:6 instructs: "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

What this really means is that we must teach our children about God.

As they begin to learn the scriptures they will be equipped to do what God will one day ask them to do.

They will understand why they need Jesus.

They will be prepared to answer the questions that will come about why they believe and what it means for them personally to have a relationship with Christ.

They will be prepared to withstand the attacks from our culture that seems less and less to appreciate a life devoted to God's ways rather than humanity's ways.

Even as we celebrate the joy of our children; even as we pray for them and send them off to another school year; we cannot forget the other children who live very differently from ours.

What is our responsibility to and for them?

All children, ours and those we have yet to meet,
will suffer disappointments in their lives.

How can we equip them to respond in life-giving
ways?

Every sign on this graphic points to a place these
children may visit in their lifetime.

Our job is to give them tools to help them respond
in transformational ways.

2. We listened to **our students** talk about their
experiences in missions.

While none of them may yet be experienced public
speakers, what we hear from them is recognition
of the need in our world today.

We can sense that they have been moved to make a
difference.

This is possible because of the tools they learned
here.

Now, it would be tempting to say that Isaiah is speaking
to a specific ancient culture about a specific military
defeat that is about to befall them.

We would be correct.

However, we should also hear a relevant message for today.

“God expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry.”

We don't have to look very far to find examples of bloodshed where justice should be; or cries of pain in the place of righteousness.

God's vineyard was planted to provide sweet fruit for the nourishment of the world.

God nurtures, protects, and tend the vineyard; yet the world still hungers for the gifts God's people were meant to bring.

Isaiah says, at some point, God may give up. Have we reached that point?

I believe there is room for **HOPE** to be heard after we digest Isaiah's proclamation.

Yes, there is judgement – God wants and expects us to do better.

Yes, there is punishment – God assures us that our choices have consequences and Jesus gives us the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats just to be sure we get the message.

BUT, there is also **HOPE**.

If we can face these realities, and own our part in them, then we might just be ready to submit again to the bruised and aching hands of the Divine Vintner, who still dreams of – and songs for – a vineyard yielding fat, gorgeous fruit for the whole world.

It is NOT too late.

What we celebrate here this morning is part of what we have to offer...*it is part of the fruit of the vineyard.*

The fact is that the signs of our times do reveal people who are lost, confused, unsure, unclear, hopeless, disillusioned, and despairing.

The fact is that God had a very different idea in mind when he set this whole thing in motion at the beginning of Creation.

Isaiah points out that humanity has made some very bad choices along the way.

Can we work with God to overcome the disappointments and move closer to what the vineyard was supposed to look like in the first place?

I believe that, *with God's help*, we can change the directions that these signs point.

We must see the signs of the times as the work of our hands and seek to change our direction.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**