

**"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He 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. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What 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? Now 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. 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." The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."**

I was having a good week, until Thursday morning when the house next door was being demolished. My cat was terrified by the mechanical monster devouring his playground next door and hid under the desk in my study. I don't normally allow that but was happy to show some compassion and grace. I thought it might sit quietly and purr at my feet but I turned around to see it sitting in my open brief-case on the floor and using it as a sand box! What a way to thank me for my understanding and compassion! Sometimes you show love and it doesn't come back to you as you'd hoped. In fact you can receive the opposite of what you'd hoped. Maybe you have shown some kindness, care and love and invested yourself in someone or something and you got no thanks, only criticism, maybe you gave your all to your spouse or kids and your marriage or kids or some other relationship didn't turn out the way you'd hoped. Some days you might even feel you have been used as a sand-box too!

God knows that feeling. Isaiah his prophet sings about it in this "song of the vineyard" today. "Sad songs say so much" sang Elton John. And this is a sad song, a song about a man who invested everything in his vineyard. He dug it up, cleared it of stones, planted it with choice vines, protected and watched over it like a child, only to watch it produce bad grapes (literally "stinking grapes!")

**"What 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?"**

And so he threatens to abandon his beloved vineyard and let it go to rack and ruin, and says **"I will command the clouds not to rain on it."** Wait a minute, only God can do that - and this is now God talking, God talking not about a vineyard but about people, his people, the people he planted and nurtured and protected and cared for, but the fruit of their lives was sour, bitter, bad, stinking rotten even.

**"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."**

"Sad songs say so much." This song says a lot about God who invests himself and his life and love in people, and how he hopes to find justice and righteousness in their lives in response, some reflection of the love and care he has shown them, but he often discovers injustice, bloodshed and distress being caused. And so he threatens judgment. He threatens to take away his loving care.

This is a song about Old Testament Israel but it is a song repeated throughout human history and it could be our song too, God's song about us. I wonder if God wrote a love song about you and

him what would he call it? These could be a few suggestions: "Somebody done somebody wrong", "Tell me why?", "Love hurts" "You picked a fine time to leave me Lucille ...?"

The story of our lives must sometimes lead to a sad song in God's heart too. Created in his image, replanted in our baptism, nurtured and fed with his word all these years, but no more holy and righteous, and still often living unrighteously and causing distress to each other.....

Thankfully that's not the only song we know about God. We know the song of the Gospel, the song of God's love for the world that sent his son into the vineyard where Christ was unjustly and unrighteously treated and killed, as today's Gospel reading predicts. But because he went through it God now sings a song of forgiveness over us, a song of grace and love and restored relationship. And we get to join in that song here together every Sunday. Each of us receives that loving care from God today, in his words of forgiveness and in the invitation to share his meal. There all the love God could give is hidden in the bread and wine as Christ comes to us in it. In exchange for the bitter taste our sins leave in God's mouth he gives us the sweet wine of his son, the wine which is the blood he shed on the cross for us, the wine of love that heals and gives life.

Love doesn't force, and neither does God force his love on us but offers it and puts it out there on the cross where he gives himself completely, makes a fool of himself even for us and he puts that love in the cup which is waiting for us this morning. God hopes his love will be returned, returned to him not just in our words and songs about him here in church, but he wants his love returned to him via others, as we love them for him, especially the unloved and unlovable and those with special needs and those who some people think don't deserve to be loved. Hopefully when God looks at us this week and sees our response to his gracious care of us here today he sings a different song about us, a song about a vineyard that bears the kind of fruit he is looking and hoping for, a fruit that reflects the love he has shown us. Hopefully he sees people living with righteousness, living justly, fairly and generously towards others, especially the poor and disadvantaged and mistreated and those we tend to leave out and leave behind.

Today is Community Care Sunday. It's about the people who come here during the week with sad songs, sad lives, little or no love, injustice and guilt on their minds and hunger in their stomachs. God calls us to respond to the love he has shown us in Christ to enable them to leave here singing a different song, even if only for a while because we can't do everything but we can do something. Today we have a representative from Lutheran Community Care with us and they can go further than we can to represent the church and God, speaking against injustice and encouraging fairness and care for all.

Funny how many of the world's best known love songs are sad songs.

People can identify with sad songs, sad "songs say so much" about broken hearts and love given but not returned, about someone who would and did give everything to another but it was walked away from, a love that is gone or turned sour. Isaiah 5:1-7 is a sad song, but it is also a love song, a song that expresses the love of God for us and calls and challenges us to respond to that love.

We know and experience the love of God in his Son Jesus Christ who called himself "the vine" and gives himself to us again today and who calls us to bear his fruit. May God sing a much happier song over our response to his love for us this week .