

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2023

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46

God is meticulous (showing great attention to detail; very careful and precise). Would you agree? Have you studied the stars? Have you observed the order, the vastness and yet the incomparable order of the heavens? Our Creator is meticulous. Anyone who has given this world even a passing glance surely has been impressed by the elements and how they work together. God poured Himself into creation. He creates by His Word. Light springs from His desire, a cosmic reflection of His nature. God is meticulous. No detail escapes His notice. Your physiology – it's amazing. The unbelieving world credits all this to happenstance, a great accident of non-personal forces bringing forth what you know and experience as life. What a dark and poor and empty philosophy evolution is – hopelessly futile, colossally vacuous.

Nowhere is God more meticulous than in creating your soul. Nowhere is God more meticulous than in working out your salvation. Nowhere is God more meticulous than in establishing His church. Nothing has been overlooked in how these three things are woven together. It is a majestic intertwining of Divine Love, a symphonic masterstroke that sings its happy melody all around us. Your soul – His gift. Your salvation – His gift. Your church – His gift. Our heavenly Father has meticulously cared for humanity and there's just one question before we go any further. Does God have a right to look for fruit, the fruit that He desires, from you, from me? We're in agreement here, aren't we? God has the right to look for fruit from us, corporately, as a synod, as a congregation. He does indeed have the right, and He certainly will, look for fruit from you and me personally. We understand that, right?

And what is the good fruit that He looks for? He looks for justice, charity, brotherly love, defending the vulnerable. God looks for honesty, humility, sacrifice, putting others' needs above your own, crucifying your pride, learning self-restraint, building reverence for Him, service for neighbor, honoring the truth. Best be sure of this, He's looking. What did God do for ancient Israel? He hauled them out of slavery in Egypt and led them to a land flowing with milk and honey. He did everything necessary to ensure their prosperity, spiritual and material. God delivered them from their enemies. He gave them His Torah, His Word. The Almighty shared His holiness with them. Israel had the extraordinary blessing of the priesthood, the sacrificial system, the Temple, the prophets. Most of all, through these things, God was *with* them. Israel was meticulously cared for. God knew it. He wanted fruit. He looked for it. When He did not find good fruit there were consequences.

Consequences; it seems as though the culture around us doesn't think that there will be consequences for the insane ideologies being lifted up as wisdom, no consequences for limitless immorality, no consequences for blasphemy and the foul fruit of militant unbelief. Was there anything more that God should have done for His vineyard? He had been meticulous. When He found no fruit there was a judgment. "I will remove (the vineyard's) hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds

that they rain no rain upon it" (Isaiah 5:5-6). That's a metaphor for a pretty radical judgment coming against those who failed to produce the fruit that God desired. Judgment is real.

It's the same story in Jesus' parable only this time the death of a son is woven in. In this parable Jesus is foretelling exactly what happened between Himself and the religious authorities. God wanted fruit. Where does fruit come from? It comes from faith. Ultimately, God sent His Son and they killed Him. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus said, quoting Isaiah: "These people honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). A bad tree can't pretend. A bad tree can't produce good fruit and unbelief is a bad tree. "Apart from faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:16). What is the bad fruit that unbelief produces? Injustice; a culture drowning in pornography and rampant alcoholism and drug abuse; killing the unborn and describing it as women's health; violence celebrated by political propagandists; police being denigrated to the point that the vulnerable aren't protected. Unbelief killed God's Son. I've blurred the lines between ancient Israel, Christ's contemporaries and us intentionally. Fallen humanity is a depraved humanity and all of us are fallen.

Ancient Israel was carried away into captivity. Can you imagine? Being taken away from your homeland, your worship, being forced into a godless culture, a godless regime, a godless land; can you imagine? Isn't that hell? Judgment; it is coming. One way or another, judgment is coming. God is looking for fruit. The fact is He's going to find it. Good fruit, that is. God will find it; somewhere. Why is that? Because God's Word doesn't return empty but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11). Meticulous; you have been baptized in the blood of Christ. The Word of the Gospel has enriched your soul, providing you an epiphany of God's grace. He carries you through dark seasons by the light of His Son. Meticulous; God's grace has meticulously seen to it that you are fed with the Word of life. Forgiveness springs from this holy house to your heart – from the pulpit, the lecturn, the font and the altar. These are tethered to your crucified King, who loved you and bore your sin. Jesus of Nazareth suffered your punishment to deliver you from slavery to sin, slavery to death. The Kingdom of heaven has swept into your soul because God is meticulous. He cultivates love in you by giving you His love. He is looking for the fruit of His Son in you.

It's there; God love is in your soul therefore the fruit of Christ's life is in you. Remember, the vineyard doesn't take care of itself. God is the one who takes care of this congregation and you in particular. I am His servant, nothing more. I am to do what I am told and I attempt to do that. He is caring for this congregation meticulously. We are well taken care of. We have a watchtower, a hedge, a wine vat. God has cleared this place of stones and planted a very choice vine. All of that is a metaphor for the ministry of Christ. All of that is a metaphor for the Word and the Sacraments. God delivers His Son's victory to us through the Word and the Sacraments and we naturally produce the fruit that He desires. That is a joy. He shares His holiness with US. He has clothed you in the royal robe of Christ's righteousness. He forgives you, blesses you, consoles you when you grieve and stirs you to pray for those who are in need. We hold His Word to be inspired and inerrant. We know that death has no sting. We know that the Lord's Supper is Christ's true body and blood by which we receive the forgiveness of our sins. We hold to these truths because God is meticulous. Christ is the true vine who has produced all this fruit. He is with us. The world's treasures are rubbish to us. We have Christ. May the fruit of our faith be pleasing in His sight.