

Sunday Thought

14th August 2022 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Isaiah: 5: 1 - 7
Psalm 80: 1 - 2, 8 - 19
Hebrews 11: 29 - 12: 2
Luke 12: 49 - 56

Can't You See?

It's harvest time. Farmers and gardeners are anxiously watching weather forecasts and assessing this year's growing season. Some will accept low yields while others plan where to store it all. I pick up a corn cob in the Supermarket, look at the price and wonder how many people realise the true cost to the grower. I think of the preparation, of land and seed, the anxious watchful waiting, expectations and sometimes sadness behind this and all produce. Even more so for some this year, struggling with the serious effects of changing weather patterns, especially in countries where devastating flood and drought have dashed all hope of harvest.



That was the experience of a friend of the prophet Isaiah. He composed today's song about his vineyard, where he had planted the best stock on the most fertile hillside. His care for this vineyard and its vines was beyond reproach. He had invested absolutely everything in aiming for the 'very best' crop. Imagine his despair – and anger – when the vines failed! The rains arrived out of time and sunshine was variable. The grapes did not ripen, and they were not alone in having a sour taste! The irate friend wants to know WHY? Why have things not turned out as I expected? What more could I have done? Desolate and aggrieved he tore up the vines and left the hillside to return its natural state. The song of the vineyard has long been understood as a parable of Jewish history. The 'Friend' is Almighty God and the vineyard the people and land of Judah. The Lord has done everything possible to make them a people of goodness and justice who live by his love commandments – and they had failed him.

The main thought I have today is about the 'Friend'. I am thinking about our Father's sadness. I listen to news from near and far. I look at the beauty and wonders of the created world – *the friend's world* – in which it all takes place. The contrast between the two can be saddening to me. How much more must God feel about human failure, discord, and selfish disobedience as he watches the news with us. The divine sadness is reflected in the words of Jesus for today. Elsewhere [John 15] he speaks of himself as the true and fruitful vine in his father's kingdom vineyard. but more of that another time. Can you hear the sorrow in his words? *'I came to set the world on fire and how I wish it was happening already!'*

There may have to be times when the world vineyard must fall apart and be ploughed up, but because God gave us Jesus, we know hope is never lost. Through him there can be replanting, rebuilding and even more abundant fruit at harvest! He tells his mostly unhearing listeners; *'I have a work of love to finish.'* He means his Cross and resurrection followed by the working of his Spirit in his real church. *'But my sadness,'* he continues, *'over a divided world of people who cannot enjoy peace, will continue until the Day of the Great Kingdom Harvest.* His words remind us of the real motive for the church's mission – sharing the sadness in the heart of God.

Jesus said, *'Can't you see? I'm here to set the world on fire with love, peace, justice. So many of you – and he spoke particularly to the 'religious' – are walking around with 'candle snuffers'. You claim to be good weather forecasters. The south wind caresses your faces, and you say, 'It's going to be hot'. The wind turns to the West and 'It's going to rain!' You know the signs. Why can't you see the signs of God's kingdom and its judgement in the world. They're all around you in the poor, the homeless, the sick, the injustice and general disobedience of the Lord's basic laws of love. See the signs. Take note. Your harvest may not be just as or when you expected.'*

Yet, there are other signs. The letter to the Hebrews gives a whole long list of those who have seen them and lived accordingly. It's a list of the faithful, *'trust and obey'* people who have seen the sign of an empty Cross – of God's better plan. These have personally shared the Lord's sorrows. They are God's people who have lived with forward looking determination, their eyes fixed on Jesus. They trust him every step of the way and, like him, they endure life's pains because they believe in the resurrection joy on the other side of the Cross.

So, today's thought offers another challenge - to note the signs of the coming kingdom harvest, to keep looking to Jesus and sharing his vision of a world on fire with the love of God who created it all by love and for love.

A prayer for National Renewal [based on Psalm 80]

Strong and compassionate Lord,
We pray for those who lead us in the governing of our nation.
Give them honour and integrity, to be accountable for the lives and needs of all our people.

We ask you to be our overall leader.
The shepherd who brings us into
pastures of prosperity
and to streams of health and healing for all,
leading us safely and purposefully through the
darkest troughs of discord and conflict.
Lord, envelope the whole land in your Spirit of
justice, goodness, and love.

