



The image is contrasting: *"Let me now sing of my friend, my friends song concerning his vineyard...."* It must have been a song of hope for all accomplished, yet a song of lament, for all that had yet to be accomplished. A song of hope filled with the possibilities of growth, life, and nourishment, tempered with the lament, *"What more was there to do for my vineyard?"* Surely a song we need to sing, a song we need to hear, and a song we have been singing!

Isaiah's song does not end like it begins. He gazes upon the vineyard and what he later sees is nothing to sing about... it is something to weep over: Growth, life, renewal, and love is rejected. The vision seems to be forgotten, a longing for another day and an old way invades the vineyard.

So too, it could be said, of what we see and hear these days. The vineyard is the world and the Church. The time is now: the outcry is loud as justice is denied! The cry of many seems to herald the end or destruction of the vineyard. The song of hope feels silenced, and God is weeping along with all who shed the tears of these days. We see so much that is discouraging, even heart rending, we hear "plaintive cries." The vineyard of these days, like Isaiah's, seems to be in ruin, ready, in the lament of the psalmist, to be "laid waste." Even in the church we love, and through which we hear the call to justice, peace, hospitality, we feel division, duplicity, broken promises, and tired spirits *and a move, for some, to a time no longer existing.*

But still, in both world and church, there are words of truth, deeds of justice, ways of compassion. honest and kind encounters, truth embraced and new vision on the horizon. Thankfully Isaiah's lament does not have the last word!

There is another vineyard, the one Matthew describes. While the vineyard is abandoned and destroyed in Isaiah, the story, in the end, is hopeful for Matthew. The Gospel preserves the vineyard, that is the human family, by choosing to encounter the "evil tenants" who hurl stones of hatred, lies, rejection and murder. In the end, Matthew reminds us, they are consumed by their own hatred, selfishness, and lies as they steal life and hope from their sisters and brothers. The Gospel tells the story of the vineyard preserved when the many rejected, are encountered with kindness and given a home; when they are respected in their diversity; when truth is told, justice pursued, and reconciliation embraced. The welcomed become the cornerstone, and the vision of love is encountered.

Caring for the "vineyard" is to make it ready for compassion, thus nurturing growth. When the tenants of the vineyard gather, like we gather here, to listen, discern and to see what *is needed and valued*; when the tenants embrace the needs of the vineyard and heed the invitation to offer a gift for the workers, thus providing nourishment.

THEN the vine flourishes and the vintage is abundant. That promise given is both hopeful and challenging. For us, our parish and the whole Church, the "vineyard" conversation is about how we prepare a place, a house, a community for those rejected, turned away, ignored, or judged; it is about how they are finally seen heard, welcomed, and how we as faithful believers are changed and renewed. That could be something wonderful to see. A vision for which we all hope and wait; a journey *forward* calling upon the name of the Lord, who alone gives new life, who sends us all to care for the vine, through the sacrifice we offer thus producing fruit that will last. For this vision, work, and struggle we are nourished at this table. We are

here *offering the sacrifice*, SHARING THE GIFT. What we bring here must be real and true. *We come to offer a "sacrifice of praise," given from what we have received.* It is over those gifts—gifts of God's creation; gifts, gifts from the treasure of our word, gifts that are real and true, given from the work of human hands. Here, in this vineyard, Sunday after Sunday, we are all made worthy to stand with Christ. Here we are nourished in love enough to keep the whole building together. Love enough to preserve the vineyard, plough the fields and produce a fruitful, abundant harvest. A harvest in which even the "bad" tenants can change their heart and find a new way of living, when they are

loved out of darkness, forgiven into light and offered a gift of hope. There is a vineyard to tend, new vines to care for; fields to plow grapes to tend and new wheat to harvest. The vision still has its time. Still there is a need to give a gift acceptable to God for our good and the good of all. The words echo through our gathering: *"What more is there to do for my vineyard? "Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen." "Take care of this vine and protect what your right hand has planted!"*

"Sing, my friends, sing the song concerning your vineyard..."

