

Sermon

Therefore I Tell you the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Our scriptures today are harsh and speak of giving up – total frustration. When we have put our all into something and yet it does not yield what we had hoped for...maybe a job, maybe a relationship, maybe a child or grandchild.

In our society today, parents are looked upon as failures if their children do not live a life of earthly success – career, finance, marriage, children, etc. The pressure can be intense when one or more of those children, despite the nurturing and constant care, falls into let's say a "different" category of success. Yet, we know some of us are not intended to live that kind of life nor do we want to. Isaiah addresses this type of disappointment with God in our scripture today.

But leaving that aside, perhaps our scripture is speaking of something a bit more broad – it appears to be speaking not of an individual but of the entire community – of all God's people.

Text shared from [workingpreacher.org](https://www.workingpreacher.org) commentary on Isaiah 5:1-7, by Amy Ogden, Professor at Saint Paul School of Theology, Oklahoma City. Parts of her commentary are shared and noted.

Amy Ogden, Professor at Saint Paul School of Theology in Oklahoma City, offers this perspective on this scripture.

“The vineyard owner determines by the end of verse 2 that all the fruit is bad. There is no waffling here, no wiggle room. The fruit is declared outright to be “only bad” (verse 2). This stark truth is jarring, baffling after so much careful sowing.

Even God seems stumped. How can it yield bad fruit? “What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?” (verse 4) The insistent drumbeat of disappointment leaves no doubt. The truth is clear: the Holy One who planted the vineyard “looked for justice but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress” (verse 7). This truth-telling is the fulcrum upon which transformation rests.

These truths may be hard to hear, yet set the foundation for the flourishing of all. Naming how things really are, not sugar-coating it or pretending maybe things are ok, is necessary. Glossing over reality does not transform it but simply covers it up, making it unavailable for transformation. The vineyard owner is clear-eyed

and unapologetic about speaking the truth. Truth-telling is the first, hard, powerful step toward change.”

This truth is hard to hear – we are much more comfortable speaking our truth to power...not accepting that this truth is about us. That we have disappointed God with our lack of justice and caring. Looking at our society, our complicity and participation albeit unknowingly, in systems that continue to oppress, we fall into the trap spoken of in our Gospel. This warning from Matthew “Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you”. Indeed it is. This world of war on our streets, day in and day out, in our schools, supermarkets...but I ask, “what can we possibly do that would really make a difference?”

Do we throw our hands up in the air because we are overwhelmed with this brokenness that we have inherited? Do we give up like the owner of the vineyard did because the problems are so pervasive, permeating every part of our lives and those of our children and grandchildren? Or do we truly believe that we

can and should and will begin to end the brokenness of our society – at least within ourselves.

So how? How can we transform? First, start by reading and educating yourselves on exactly where complicity lies. Seek an understanding from who live with this every day. I attended a Racial Healing Circle this past Saturday with some of my colleagues and Dr. Wylie from Orchard Park, who has two small children, and two members from Buffalo Voice, an organization built to empower those who are marginalized, shared some thing they've had to do with their children, and something they have experienced themselves. "The Talk". Explaining to their very young child that they are black and that because of that, some people, some other children, will see them differently. For Wylie, he had a good friend and they hung out together for a long time – they enjoyed sports together but one day his friend kind of disappeared. He didn't return his calls, was no longer available for playdates so Wylie finally asked- what's the deal. And his friend said, I can't play with you anymore because you're black. And Wylie was confused, I'm not black, I'm brown – what do you mean?

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So he went home and he and his mother had “the talk”. “The Kingdom of God will be taken away – from you, by you.”

Ogden continues in her message – “By the time we get to the end of these verses, it’s hard to remember the very first line. This song is declared for “the one I love,” God’s beloved. Admittedly, the shift from second to first person through the song makes it hard to determine just who is the “beloved”. But there is no doubt that the vineyard was lovingly prepared and planted.

Can we know ourselves to be both God’s beloved and also the powerful to whom truth is spoken? The good news is: Yes! This is the hard and hopeful place of faith. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).”

The truth is freedom. Letting go of a life of separation and segregation is freedom. Wanting a world where McKeena and McKenza never have to have “the talk”...that, my beloved, is a world worth fighting for.

Amen

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