

Can you hear Isaiah's song? Can you imagine, with me, how Isaiah's vineyard-song starts: happy, melodic notes singing a love song about God's vineyard. As the prophet sings of God digging and clearing, building a watchtower and planting choice vines, the song's chords align in pleasant harmonies, major chords, and bright notes.

But then the vineyard and the music take a turn: The field does not yield choice grapes but wild grapes. Without proper care, the vines run amok, becoming overgrown, dry and brittle. The song sounds darker, ominous, sombre. The briars diminish its chords and the thorns mute its cheer.

God gave Isaiah this song to draw sinful people closer to God. And God gave many songs melodies to the people of Israel to build up their faith. God had gifted them the psalms to chant to know and praise God; and the prophet's melodies to tell of God's promise and peace as well as human brokenness and sin. God had given them music to make together to grow in faith and community together.

As a young boy living and worshipping with the Israelite people, Jesus would have been surrounded by this music. Imagine Jesus as a boy, growing up in Temple, listening to Isaiah's love-song about the vineyard. Jesus surely knew this song as he know all of scripture. We see it in how he uses the vineyard for this parable. While spoken instead of sung, we can hear the story start out with harmonious peace and potential-- only to have it end on discordant notes of with violence, revenge, and destruction. Then, Our Lord even quotes a psalm, a song of his tradition's hymnody, to summarize the parable's message. God gave God's people the gift of music and it built up Jesus' faith.

Through the ages, we have inherited God's gift of music all the way to today. For music is, as Luther writes, a "precious, worthy, and costly treasure given to humankind by God" to remind us of that "heavenly dance, where all meet in a spirit of friendliness, caress and embrace"

God gives us songs to build up our faith: to show us who we are and who God is. In these texts, Isaiah and Jesus both use music to capture the ups-and-downs and twists-and-turns of our lives and our faith with God. They paint a picture of God's sheer love for all parts of creation and praise God's good handiwork; but the songs also teach the hard lesson that we screw that goodness up.

We need God's songs today, because the world we know isn't all pleasant harmonies, major chords, and bright notes. It seems more and more, one natural disaster after another, one protest after another, one mass shooting after another, that we are living in the poorly tended vineyard that's not producing in Isaiah's song. The wild grapevines

have run amok with briars of violence, thorns of bigotry, and clouds of misunderstanding.

The Good News, is that God has given us songs so we may know that, nonetheless, even in the midst of the screwed-up vineyard, God is here, with us. God gives us music to sing every song we need in life.

God gives songs of lament, for times when the only prayer we can muster is "I want Jesus to Walk With Me."

God gives us songs of protest, reminding us that "We Shall Overcome" and calling us to "Lift Every Voice and Sing 'til earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty!"

God gives us songs to accompany us in our grief: asking, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" and remembering "For all the saints, who from their labors rest."

God gives us songs to remind us of who we are and who God is: that "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing..." and "though hordes of devils fill the land, we tremble not unmoved we stand!"

And so, even though the vineyard runs wild with brambles, we sing.

We sing because the music of our faith extends the work of God's Word;

We sing because hymns proclaim judgment and offer salvation.

We sing to acknowledge sin and be set free from it.

We sing because that heavenly dance, of friendliness, caress and embrace is who we are, and who God is.

We sing because God has given us songs to do so.

We sing because in our music, God is with us. And so, with God here, we sing now our Hymn of the Day, "When in Our Music, God is Glorified."

Rev. Kathryn L. Pocalyko  
Lutheran Church of Our Saviour  
North Chesterfield, Virginia  
October 8, 2017  
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Sermon series observing the 500th  
Anniversary of the Protestant  
Reformation

Topic: Music  
Isaiah 5:1-7  
Excerpt from Luther's foreword to Georg  
Rhau's 1538 work, "Symphoniae  
iucundae,"  
Matthew 21:33-46