

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“Taste of Eternity”

Isaiah 5: 1-7

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Last week, we got a taste of Dr. Isaiah’s preaching. He could definitely pound a pulpit when the occasion called for it. And he had... right off the bat, delivered one really hard-to-hear sermon.

Of course, after that, anytime the folks saw him coming... they must have run the other way. **“Look out, here comes Isaiah again. If you don’t want him nailing you to the wall, you’d better hide.”** And folks did.

It made it really hard for a prophet to get his message out when everyone was avoiding him like the plague. So... in chapter five, Isaiah changed his approach. He went from pulpit pounding to parable telling.

And so, on that day, when he got dressed to head down to the temple... he didn’t put on his preachin’ robe. Instead, he got all “duded” up like a folk singer. He wore a disguise so no one would recognize him.

Got him a really funny hat...

A colorful tunic...

Slipped on some imported sandals.

And then he grabbed his guitar and headed down to the temple courtyard, where he plopped down and started singing folk tunes. He put a little jar there for tips and off he went playing all the ole’ folk favorites.

“Jeremiah Cracks Corn but I Don’t Care.”

“Jacob and Rachel were Sweethearts.”

“Babylonian Girls Won’t you Come Out Tonight.”

“Noah Row that Boat Ashore.”

Of course, he did that standard from Egypt, “I’ve Been Working on the Pyramid, *all the live-long day.*”

For a preacher, he was really pretty good... and after about 30 minutes he had a great crowd gathered round... so he said, **“Who wants to hear an original? I just wrote it last night.”** Well, everyone cheered to Isaiah’s delight.

“It’s called, The Ballad of My Good Buddy’s Vineyard.” They cheered even louder cuz’ everyone likes a good vineyard song. (*Sung to the tune of “Ole’ Susanna”*)

I sing today ‘bout my best friend,

his vineyard I did know.

He’d searched so long and found a place,

the best grapes for to grow.

Well he worked for months and cleared the stones

and planted choicest vines.

Put a tower up, a fence around,

dug a big press to make wine.

*O that vineyard was perfect, don't you think.
But the crop arrived and "O my gosh"
the grapes how they did stink.*

Of course, when Isaiah sang that... everyone was shocked... because everyone knows, if you have fertile soil and prepare it well and plant the best vines and protect them, you'll have wonderful grapes and eventually, fine wine. He just strummed a while as they mumbled a bit. Then it was on to the second verse. Isaiah was grinning inside as he sang.

*Now you dwellers in Jerusalem,
you be the judge for me.
How should my friend respond to this...
you tell me, what should be?
Remove the wall? Put down his hoe?
Move on to other things?
It's a waste of time to work so hard.
If stinky fruit it brings.*

Well the folks were all nodding their heads in agreement while they tapped their toes to the beat as Isaiah went into the final chorus... and went for the kill.

*O this vineyard, well it belongs to God.
And we're the fruit that smells so bad,
Cause we're a bunch of frauds.
Justice and mercy, were on the mind of God.
But war and woe was all he got,
Our faith is a façade.*

Well... that's the song Isaiah sang that day in lieu of preaching a sermon. The song, of course, was a Trojan Horse... **Get them tapping their toes before you rap them on the knuckles...** But rap them he did.

We were called and created to be something special... Vintage people of God. That's what the wine metaphor is wanting them to see. The word there in the song for vine, indicates that the owner of the vineyard bought the very best.

He wasn't out to produce "Box-O-Wine," here. This was no Boones Farm factory. This was a vineyard planed to produce the finest.

So the parable implies great involvement and investment.

A great, fertile hillside...

Rocks cleared... all the obstacles moved.

The best vines.

And there was a wall, a hedge to keep out all the varmints.

Everything was in place to produce something really special and unique. This was to be wine that really stood out... Wine that let a person's pallet know what wine was really about. I mean, this was to be the template for wines to come.

So that folks who'd been so satisfied with jug wine, would say, "**O my gosh, I never knew it could taste like this.**" And they never are satisfied with anything less after that. They'd do whatever it took to enjoy that wine in the future.

Everyone in heaven was so excited and hopeful about this new wine... and they all had suggestions for the new label... what to call the winery.

"Heaven's Hills."

"Heavenly Sunshine."

"God's Good Stuff"

They all finally settled on Taste of Eternity Vineyards. It was the perfect name for the best wine. Wonderful color... bouquet... flavor that hooked you on the first mouthful. A label that would stand out and that would invite other vineyards everywhere to a new level of winemaking.

That's what God intended.

That was what God had invited his people to. "**Be something unique, so that those living half lives... unawake lives... unjust lives... could know what it's all about. They could finally taste the real thing.**" God had invested and planned for that.

But the folks had settled for being something typical... ordinary... They were satisfied and satiated with being like all the other nations. They became drunk with mediocrity and even produced rotten fruit.

"God had looked for justice and there was violence instead... God hoped for righteousness... but there were constant cries of distress." They'd become just like the other nations... which is what they'd always wanted. Ironically, the nation born in slavery was oppressing people. That ole' Boones Farm way of being... unloving... unawake... ego and ethnocentric. Flavorful, only to those who'd never tasted eternity.

It happens... We get dulled to the real... Filled up with lesser things. And God is always calling folks beyond that.

He did that in Israel.

In Jesus...

In the church...

And wants to do that in each one of us. God invites us to be something unique in the world. And it's not just about being nicer or more moral... Though that's a good place to start.

It's about being vintage stuff... Vintage being... Transformed and alive. Full-bodied being. Flavorful to the max. This is what we have a taste of in Jesus. The Psalmist says, "**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**" And we have and it's amazing.

And we, who know there's something more, are invited to offer that fine wine to everyone... Living with open and warm hearts, serving with unselfish hands, being alive with gratitude and hope, welcoming all that is and leaving not one thing unblest by who we are.

If you met someone like that...

got a taste of that good stuff...

you'd never settle for box-o-life again.

You'd get a whiff of that familiar bouquet of fear you've drunken for so long and you'd say, "**No way.**" "**Give me the good stuff God.**"

And all those other things you've instinctively imbibed in: materialism, jealousy, competitiveness, judgement and critique. You used to swig them... but not anymore.

And now you notice folks... clutching their paper bags, which hide bottles of cheap pain and insecurity... or anger... or resentment. And you say, **“Here... have a taste of something better.”**

And when you see the culture guzzling at the barrel of injustice... You’ll say, **“Enough! Have a taste of something better.”**

And you bump into someone arrogantly sipping legalism... and you’ll say, **“Here, try some of this.”**

It is our delightful task, as a church, to serve up the good stuff for one another and for the world.

We get to taste and then...

lo and behold and by God’s grace,
we become the tasted.

There’s a great little film called *Babette’s Feast*, in which a former Cordon Bleu Parisian chef who lost everything in the terrorist uprising of 1871, flees to Denmark where she is taken in by two aging sisters.

She becomes their cook, though they have no idea of her identity and skill and so she cooks very plain meals. She does this, in part, because the sisters believe extravagance is sinful. These two sisters, you see, were carrying on their father’s teachings in this rather austere religious community.

After years of work and duty, they’re tired and disillusioned and the people are gray and crabby... things are disintegrating.

In a strange twist, Babette wins the lottery and decides to have a dinner party for the town. She spends it all and prepares an amazing meal. The town turns up out of kindness but they’re nervous as they sit down.

And stunned as they begin to eat... but course after amazing course comes out and they let themselves enjoy this great feast, this eucharistic banquet. And by the end of the meal, they’re different.

At the end of the meal... a General (who was passing through and an old friend) rises to give a toast. In it, he says... **“There comes a time when our eyes are opened. And we come to realize that mercy is infinite. We need only to await it with confidence and receive it with gratitude.”**

The folks, having imbibed of something beyond themselves, went home, lighter... arm in arm, knowing something deep down, where the finest things had touched them. May that be true for us as well.

*Well they came from Waco, Texas,
with something on their minds.
To hear the call of God,
and care for humankind.
They did work and pray, and sing and love,
the truth they sought to see.
And came to be the juicy fruit,
that they were meant to be.*

*O praise God, for this mystery
Where hearts meet grace and we become
A taste of eternity. Amen.*