



Hope Springs ETERNAL

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Cycle A

Isaiah 5, 1-7
Philippians 4, 6-9
Matthew 21, 33-43

GATHERING

(An unlit candle, a length of grapevine, if available, some bundles of grapes and a small clear glass bowl of water rest on a table in the gathering place.)

This week we focus on God's own hope for his people in spite of our disappointing him again and again. Last week Paul called us to empty ourselves for others as Christ empties himself for us. How did you put someone else's needs before your own this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. Members join in singing, "The Peace of God." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community rests for a time in the presence of God. After some minutes of silence, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: Lord, we are your vine, your people.

- All: Protect what you have planted.
- Leader: Do not let us withdraw from you.
- All: Give us new life and we will praise your name.
- Leader: Lord, restore us; let your face shine upon us.
- All: Look upon us, Lord, and we shall be saved.
- Leader: God of hope, be with us in all the experiences and transitions of our lives. Be our hope when the events of our lives bring disappointment and failure. Take our worries. Grant us your peace which is beyond all understanding. In Jesus' name, we pray.
- All: Amen.

Focus Question

Describe an experience when you felt disappointed.

Commentary

"What more could have been done?" A question like that was asked in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and after the collapse of the Minnesota Bridge. We've heard that question also following earthquakes and tsunamis. Parents who have struggled with a difficult son or daughter have also lamented, "What more could we have done?" Natural disaster is one thing; human failure is another.

We hear Isaiah echo the cry of disappointment on behalf of the owner of the vineyard, who we know, of course, is our God. The Lord of hosts is deeply disappointed with his cherished plant, the House of Israel. It has not borne rich fruit, but rather wild grapes. God's immense love for his people makes it difficult to accept their failure. Speaking through the prophet, God threatens abandonment, but this cry of disappointment is meant to reclaim his people.

In this week's Gospel, we hear Jesus recalling this story, but now with a

twist. The landowner's disappointment here is not with the vineyard but with the tenants. Instead of caring for the vineyard with gratitude, they were intent on making profits for themselves, even to the point of killing the owner's messengers, including his son.

In both stories, the owner of the vineyard did things right, but the results were disappointing. The stories rehearse the pattern of Israel's relationship with God. Sadly, they also put us in touch with our own sometimes disappointing relationship with God, personally, and as a church.

How often do you disappoint our good God?

God gives us everything we need, including his son, but God's grace is not forced on us. God gives us what we need to bear good fruit. And God does expect that we be fruitful.

Jesus makes the stakes even more explicit than Isaiah. God's work will be accomplished. God's kingdom will thrive, even if we disappoint him. God's love endures in the midst of it all. We cannot seize our inheritance. It is pure gift. Our task is to live the good and virtuous life out of simple gratitude. The God of challenge urges us on. The God of hope walks with us as we cultivate the vineyard so that it brings forth life, peace and justice.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Name a time when you know you lived up to God's hopes for you.
- ◆ When have you disappointed God?
- ◆ Recall a time when you totally dedicated yourself to life beyond yourself.
- ◆ Mention some area of your life where God is at work helping you to bear good fruit.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to pray for the good of the nation. Pray for office holders and candidates that they promote the common good and all life values.

- ◆ If elections are approaching in your area, seek out and participate in a voter registration drive in your area. Encourage others to register to vote.
- ◆ The National Rural Life Conference applies Catholic social teaching to such issues as the land, farms, stewardship of creation, ethics and legislation. Learn about their stands on agriculture and the environment and support them. National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 4625 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, IA 50310; 515-270-2630.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of silence. A selection of instrumental .is played. When the music is complete, members gather around the grapevine and grapes to pray as follows.)

Leader: God of all creation, look upon the vine and these grapes and upon each of us who have been grafted on the vine of Jesus. Let your divine life always pulse through us. Give us your Holy Spirit so we may respond generously to your grace. In Jesus' name, we pray.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us each bless this vine and these grapes and each other with this life-giving water.

(Members sprinkle the vine and grapes and each other with the water. When the sprinkling is complete, the prayer concludes as follows.)

All: Bless this vine which you have planted that we may bear fruit in you, O God.

Leader: Let us go in peace.

All: Thanks be to God.

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