

## Sermon for Morning Prayer The Second Sunday in Advent

### Lessons:<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>2</sup>

“Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

“Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath,<sup>3</sup> and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah<sup>4</sup> [EE-fah].

“Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the ta-

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<sup>3</sup> A unit of liquid measure equal to approximately 5-1/5 wine gallons.

<sup>4</sup> A unit of dry measure equal to approximately 21 dry quarts or 2/3 of a bushel.

<sup>5</sup> St. John 5: 19-40 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 5: 3-4 (RSV).

<sup>7</sup> Hosea 10: 1 (RSV).

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 2: 21 (RSV).

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 19: 10-14.

<sup>10</sup> St. John 15: 1-2 (RSV).

<sup>11</sup> HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDs., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA REVISED STANDARD VERSION 828 fn. (1977).

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 5: 1-7.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 5: 7 (RSV).

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 5: 8-22.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 5: 8-10.

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 5: 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 5: 13-17.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 5: 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 5: 20.

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 5: 21.

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 5: 22-23.

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 5: 26-30.

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bret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands.

“Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat. Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

“And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, be-

## Conclusion:

Isaiah was writing prior to that Assyrian invasion and conquest, which did, indeed, come. His message should have been clear to his contemporary audience, just as it should be clear to us today.

As people who have been called by God into a Covenant with Him, we have but two choices. We can, each of us, embrace that Covenant, and with it all of the individual and collective obligations and responsibilities that Covenant membership entails.

Or we can, again each of us for ourselves, reject that Covenant relationship. If we make this choice, then we avoid all of the onerous duties and obligations that membership requires but, necessarily, we likewise waive and reject all the benefits of that membership as well.

Where the chief benefit of membership in the Covenant is the ability to be in fellowship with God, we should think long and hard before we make any of those seemingly insignificant individual daily choices that amount to rejecting the obligations of the Covenant and therefore to rejecting the Covenant and, with it, rejecting God Himself.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>23</sup>  
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<sup>1</sup> *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 30 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xix (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 5: 1-30 (KJV).

of it in today's First Lesson is at least qualitatively distinct from theirs. That is because instead of basing a line or two upon it, he makes it into an entire allegorical discourse on God's judgement upon Israel, a discourse that occupies the entirety of Chapter 5 of his book and amounts in all to thirty Verses.

This "Song of the Vineyard"<sup>11</sup> follows a pattern common to other such discourses. First, there is a lament in seven Verses,<sup>12</sup> setting up the metaphor of the vineyard as the aggrieving party and the vinedresser as the aggrieved one, asking witnesses to give judgement between the parties as to which one has done the other wrong.

Next, Isaiah makes explicit the connection between his metaphor and his audience:

"For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of  
Israel,  
and the men of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
and he looked for justice,  
but, behold, bloodshed;  
for righteousness,  
but behold, a cry!"<sup>13</sup>

Then, over the next fourteen Verses,<sup>14</sup> come six distinct reproaches or causes for God's complaint against Israel: its greed;<sup>15</sup> its debauchery<sup>16</sup> with its accompanying state of ignorance;<sup>17</sup> its mocking of God;<sup>18</sup> its moral depravity,<sup>19</sup> its conceit,<sup>20</sup> and its bravado and corruption.<sup>21</sup>

It will be to punish these serious shortcomings, Isaiah tells the Jews, that God will summon the Assyrians to execute His judgment upon them.<sup>22</sup>

hold, they shall come with speed swiftly: None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.<sup>5</sup>

"... Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth [SHOW-eth] him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew [SHOW] him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in him-

self; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

“There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

“But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### Text:

From the First Lesson:

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and men of Judah,  
judge, I pray you, between me  
And my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard,

that I have not done in it?  
When I looked for it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes?”<sup>6</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### Homily:

Several times, the Old Testament prophets employed the image of Israel as a vine or vineyard, with the implication that a healthy plant brings forth sweet fruit and a well-ordered plantation is productive and free of weeds and other undesirable growths. Thus Hosea says “Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit”.<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah quotes the Lord as reproaching the Hebrews with the words:

““Yet I planted you a choice vine,  
wholly of pure seed.  
How then have you turned degenerate  
and become a wild vine?””<sup>8</sup>

And Ezekiel refers to the exile of his countrymen by likening them to a vine that was plucked up, left to dry, and then in weakened condition transplanted to arid and sterile soil.<sup>9</sup> From these passages, that would have been familiar to any ancient Jew,

Our Lord himself took up this metaphor, which He several times used, including notably as reported by St. John: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”<sup>10</sup>

However, if Isaiah’s use of this figure of speech about the vine and the vineyard is qualitatively similar to that of other important Old Testament prophets, his employment