

Today's First Reading and Gospel are stories about us bearing fruit – in other words, helping others, doing good for others, especially for the poor. And bearing good fruit is linked to judgment day.

The prophet Isaiah's parable about the vineyard that produced sour grapes, is about God's love and patience for his people Israel and all he has repeatedly done for them. But they refuse to reflect God's love to others; they disregard people in need. And so the vineyard Israel is destroyed, and its people sent into exile. Tough love, ruin, is the only way they'll ever change for the better.

In Jesus's parable, the tenant farmers are the religious leaders of his day. Jesus, the Son of God, came to teach them God's will, new interpretations of their Law, but they like the *status quo* and don't want any change. It's their vineyard. They don't want God's Son to claim the Father's rightful share of the harvest, the good fruit of the Jewish people. And so they keep rejecting Christ, and finally kill him.

Today's readings hold a mirror up to us. Have we become that Israel? that vineyard? Are we too comfortable with ourselves to bear fruit?

Bearing fruit shows we've accepted Christ's offer of salvation to us, that we live with and share the grace God has given us, and help accelerate the growth of God's Kingdom in our world.

This idea of bearing fruit isn't intended to guilt-trip us. Fruitfulness doesn't come primarily from our work, but from letting God's Spirit work through us. Our part is to not resist the Spirit's whispers to us, about what to do in situations.

God gives us everything we need to bear good fruit: the people, events and circumstances of our lives that God has entrusted to our care, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit we received at Confirmation: doing our good works with love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness and the other gifts goes a long way. Whether they are painful or joyful experiences, we can bring forth good fruit from them.

Like the people in those vineyards in today's scriptures, God will keep on us, and pursue us to help us, because he loves us and doesn't want to see us exclude ourselves from his kingdom by our selfishness. He doesn't give up on us. That's the good news of this gospel, the positive takeaway. It gives us hope and joy.

So let's ask ourselves: how are we growing? What do our children or grandchildren see? Do we care about the world they will inherit? What kind of fruit are we producing in our work and social circles? Are we producing the fruits of the kingdom of God that help the poor and vulnerable, or have we become the new keepers of the *status quo* that benefits us?

Isaiah and Jesus unveiled the violence of their day. Today's protestors are our prophets; they're stewards of this gospel, because they're warning us we neglect the ways of justice and ignore the poor, with racism, economic injustice, human trafficking, capital punishment, the plight of immigrants, and the violence to our environment that our grandchildren will have to live through. We can't solve these problems by ourselves,

but we can bear fruit there, when we do little things with great love, as St. Mother Teresa said.

Bearing fruit, doing good works, how we care for the poor and the vulnerable, are how we'll be judged when Christ returns at harvesttime. We won't get away with saying, "I was baptized." Faith is lived. Faith includes action to produce the fruits of the kingdom. If we work to help bring God's Kingdom on earth, we will share in the joy of the harvest, in the world that has no end.

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