

One of the toughest things for a parent is watching children grow up. At birth we are all told, "oh, they will grow up so quickly!" And we can't imagine that is true until the day comes when they leave home. And a day comes when they make their own decisions and it is no longer our decision.

Sometimes they do well and sometimes they don't. What is most difficult at that moment is to realize their decisions are their decisions, and there is no more that a parent can do to influence the core personality of their child. Either you know what that means as a parent, or by the way your parent has walked with you.

Isaiah spoke to Israel after they had turned away from God. They had ignored his love, become selfish and pagan in their living, and found themselves in all sorts of hot water. In a real sense, this parental care is what the message from the prophet Isaiah was all about. Isaiah proclaimed that God is pained by the actions of his children Israel who have stumbled and strayed. In loving pain God cries out loud, "what more could I do?"

This text is a powerful "LOVE SONG" of God for his people. It is a tender and bittersweet tender ballad of a father's love for his children in the midst of their suffering and pain. He recalls that, like a farmer caring for a vineyard, he nourished their lives, he pruned away what was stunted and diseased, and daily shared his tender loving care. And in the end, it seemed to be to no avail.

After all his efforts, the northern tribes were carried off into slavery and Judah was carried into exile in Babylon. As Isaiah channels God's voice it rings out as a wail and cry of grief. The words are so simple and direct. "What more could I have done?"

What a terrible cry that is for any partner or anyone whose loved one has strayed. Such a frustration is not one of anger or vengeance, but simply the pain of a wonderful and unrestrained love. What a painful cry for parents when we feel as if we have failed our children! And, to be honest, we struggle in the same way with any of the trials and tribulations of life. We all know the lyrics of that song, "what else could I have done? What could I have tried that would have worked? Why did my efforts turn out so wrong?"

I don't have to tell you what it feels like when love is not returned or rewarded. You know the pain and you have cried that cry. You know how it hurts when a family struggles with in-laws or the personalities of a new marriage. You know the pain when the love, time, or energy you share with anyone just doesn't seem to be enough.

That, my friends, is when we "sing the blues." And it is just like God's song in Isaiah.

In a powerful story Jesus shared one day with those who would listen, he told of a beautiful vineyard that an owner leased out to tenants while he travelled far away. And despite the blessings of good work and great pay, the workers revolted, refused to pay the rent, and even killed the owner's son when he came to bring healing and peace. This, of course, was a prophetic story for Jesus was speaking ahead of time of the reward he would be rejected, abused, crucified and buried in the earth, simply for seeking to represent his heavenly Father in the daily lives of the people of earth who were given the blessing of living and working on this vineyard called earth.

“What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done for it?” Filled with the same love of Isaiah’s beautiful lament, God came to earth in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He chose not to give up on the vineyard but to do even more. When Jesus was rejected and sealed with a stone in a tomb, God responded with Easter. Jesus’ prophetic proclamation “that the stone that the earth’s builders had rejected would become the cornerstone of a new kingdom” had now come to pass.

And it continues to bring life today. That is the surprise of the Gospel, and the love that has no other description than to be called “grace.” Despite God’s frustration with Israel and Judah, out of a remnant of that kingdom came the Messiah. Despite the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, out of that tomb came the resurrected Savior of all.

Despite our failures, Easter brings life to death and love to loveless living. The future is not dependent on our goodness or destroyed by our sin, but instead is given back as a gift of grace by a God who can’t stop loving. Even while singing the blues our God of love proclaims the great hosanna of his endless love. It is like a parent who is so frustrated with a child’s disobedience but cannot help but continuing to love and support the one with whom is invested so much love. It doesn’t make sense, which is why there is no other word than grace! And what a good word that is.

Just as empty water jugs became filled with wine at Cana, so the sour grapes of our sin are changed by Christ into the refreshing new life of discipleship and faith. Just as the darkest Friday of all time was simply the prelude to Easter’s dawn, so even our selfish rebellion can be turned around by God’s love.

Think about how many struggles and how much pain is because workers in the vineyard have forgotten WHOSE vineyard it is and WHAT our work is called to be.

When we begin by remembering who has created. Who has nourished. Who has invested so much for any and all, will that not change how we live? And what a gift that becomes when others put God rather than self at the forefront of any decision. There is nothing that is not God’s, and for which we are only called to be a steward and responsible tenant for.

Think about how that would change the play in neighborhoods? Or between nations! How it would change the relationship of marriage, or even that give and take of politics! When we forget WHOSE vineyard it is and WHAT our work is called to be we have forgotten the real meaning and purpose of life. Like workers in the vineyard who rebelled out of selfishness and greed, when our first impulse is to say “mine” we have already lost sight of who we really are and why we were created to be.

I remember talking to my son who looked at ultrasound of 2 month old fetus and saw heart beating and arms and legs. He said, “Dad, how anyone say “this is not a life?” And through my tears I realized my son was already a father. And I knew that he understood that was not an entity to be controlled but a gift from a loving God!

So WHAT about tomorrow? How will our vineyard song sound?

Will we live as if everything is about me, or understand what it means to be stewards of God? Will planting and loving be enough, or will we try to play “god?” Will crops rot on the vine? Will we keep abundance for self? Will selfishness strangle stewardship? OR will we faithfully serve AS we have first been served?

Even more than our successes or failures in working the fields, will we daily remember whose field it is, in which we have been privileged to serve as parents, neighbors, students, workers, citizens, and friends?

Despite "sour taste" of sin God doesn't sing "blues" but song of forgiveness and love. May that become our daily song as well, and no matter what our musical style is, let us pray that our love will reflect his and our harvest will be for him.

May God's love song become our "life song!" Amen.