

**Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**October 8, 2023**

Do you believe the world is the way God wants it to be?

Let's take a moment to think about that. Do you believe the world is the way God wants it to be? My guess is that probably everyone in this church came up with nearly the exact same response. "No - of course not." After all, we can look in many places to see evidence supporting our answer, some evidence close to home and some evidence far away. We see struggles and discord and pain in our own families. God couldn't possibly want that. We turn on our computers every day only to find fraudulent e-mails sent from people trying to steal our private information, and receive countless phone calls from people trying to scam us in one way or another. God couldn't want that.

We see an enormous pile of garbage floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and factories still belching junk into the air in some parts of the world. God can't possibly want that. We hear of more than a few elected officials stealing from the public coffers, especially in Africa, my country Ghana being #1. God couldn't want any of that.

And, of course, we also see the really big stuff - war, poverty, famine, oppression, murder, God certainly can't want those things. No - it seems pretty obvious that the world we are living in can't be exactly the world God had envisioned when he created all of this from nothing.

Now, let me ask a different question. Is the world the way YOU would like it to be? Hmm. . . Maybe you quickly came to the same answer as before. "No, of course not." But if that's true, if all of us believe that the world isn't the way we want it to be, then why doesn't the world look different? Why DOESN'T the world look more like the world we want, the world we hope for, the world we dream about?

In other words if GOD wants the world to be a certain way, and WE want the world to be that SAME way, why shouldn't that have happened already? Shouldn't that be our reality? Shouldn't the world be a kind of Eden, perfect in nearly every way?

Of course, my use of the word "Eden" here was meant to guide us to a certain conclusion, to get us to realize that whatever is wrong with the world is not because God isn't doing his part, but because we aren't doing ours, it is not because God has "failed" in some way, but because we have. And I would even go as far as to argue that the whole premise of my argument is flawed, my premise that God and we both want the same things for the world, both want the world to look the same way. And I'm not sure that's the case.

Oh, we SAY we do. We're good at that - saying things that sound good on paper, saying things that try to convince others (and ourselves) that our motives are pure, that WE just want a beautiful world filled with love and kindness and generosity and forgiveness and mercy and justice - just like GOD does.

But we sure don't seem to live that way. At least not in the ways that will bring about the beautiful world God wants. And much of our behavior points to us actually wanting very different things for the world than God wants.

And in that sense, our choices, our decisions, and our sin get us exactly what we truly want (deep down in the recesses of our hearts), a world in which . . .

We get to do what we want, when we want, how we want.

We get to hold on to our grudges, refusing to forgive if our pain is great enough.

We get to dislike and distrust others who are different from us.

We get to pursue basically one goal - to achieve “success” in the eyes of others. (\$\$\$)

We even get to USE others (family, friends, coworkers, and especially romantic partners) as a means to an end, rather than ends in themselves, loving them when it suits our needs, and discarding them when we no longer have need of them.

Yes, we might SAY that we want the world God wants, but our actions seem to indicate that we actually want a much different world, one in which we are entitled to whatever we want. It’s as if we each feel that the world is ours, that we are the ones in charge, the ones who don’t owe anything to anyone.

And then we come face to face with today’s challenging readings. Both Isaiah in the First Reading and Jesus in our Gospel passage use the metaphor of a vineyard to drive home some very sobering points. And while the two readings don’t use the image of a vineyard in exactly the same way, two things seem to come out loud and clear in both of them. One - God provides everything needed (hedge, wine press, tower). And two - God is the landowner, the one in charge, the one to whom the yield is due.

And therein lies the challenge, for we often struggle embracing these two deep truths. Sometimes we live as if God really doesn’t get a say in the choices we make. We live as if the world (and our corner in it) is not God’s but is actually ours - ours to do with what we please. And so, producing the “good fruit” that God wants takes a back seat to the “fruit” that we want to grow, takes a back seat to whatever we want to do. And so, we sometimes act selfishly, acting purely in our self-interest, and bear the kind of fruit that actually harms the world, makes it far less than it was created to be.

And sometimes we live as if God really isn’t doing his part, as if God isn’t providing us with everything we need. We tend to blame God for our lives

not turning out the way we had hoped. We blame him for every bad thing we see in our lives and in the world. When we hold this sort of view, it's as if we think that God has to change for the world to be better, rather than think that each of us needs to change to help bring about a more beautiful world, a kinder world, a more just world, a more perfect world. Put simply, it's easy to do nothing when we think everything is God's problem or God's fault and not ours.

My dear friends, at the heart of Christianity is the profound truth of the utter graciousness of God, an incredible God who gives us everything we need, pouring out his grace and blessings simply because he loves us. And he didn't do this just at creation, God continues to do this every second of every day, most perfectly shown in the sending of his Son to save us and heal a broken world.

And when we take everything God provides, when we take seriously our responsibility to tend the vineyard faithfully, beautiful things will happen, beautiful fruit will be borne, a beautiful world will become a more visible reality, little by little through every act of love, however great or small.

Does God want a better world? Do we want a better world?

My dear friends, let's stop looking to God to make it happen from the outside, but rather allow God to make it happen through every human heart open to his grace.