

This past week the church commemorated St. Francis of Assisi... And so, I would to start worship with a prayer attributed to him...

Let us pray. Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi was from the 12th century. He is known for his love and care for the poor and is also known for his love of animals and creation.

Some churches celebrate him by having a blessing of the animal's service. And if you have pets or animals at home that you would like to bless. There is a blessing on the last page of your bulletin, for you to take home.

Now, the concept of blessing dates back to our Old Testament... When God first said to Abraham... I will bless you, so that you can be a blessing...

A blessing that was given without boundaries... As this blessing has no end...

This blessing was meant to be lived out in Abrahams many, many decedents by sharing God's blessings with all people and all the earth.

Through which, it was meant to bring about salvation to all creation.

An image that is so expansive it is hard to wrap one's head around...

But at the core of God's message is this... God is blessing Abraham so that all of creation may be blessed.

So that all of creation can move forward together into a better future...

A future that throughout the Old Testament, story after story, we hear how people failed to live into that time and time again.

For example, this is what we heard in our Isaiah reading today...

Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of a beloved vineyard... A vineyard that was lovingly planted and tended, but somehow things went horribly wrong.

A passage that was first delivered to the tribe of Israel, aka Abraham's decedents, to remind them of their calling...

As they are called to be a blessing to all nations. Which is done by producing good fruit and bringing forth God's love... Which in turn creates a better future for all.

Fast forward some centuries... And we come to our gospel reading from today.

Where we hear a passage that sounds similar to Isaiah... As this is another passage about a vineyard...

But this passage is different... This time the vineyard itself produces good fruit... However, the tenants do not.

Which leads us to a similar conclusion as Isaiah... That the fruits of our labor matter... Because what we produce impacts the future.

A future that at the time of this gospel was much different than our future now... As you may recall from last week, this gospel takes place during... Holy Week.

And Holy Week, as we all know, leads to Jesus' death.

A death that was brought on by people... A death that was like the death of the son in the parable of the wicked tenants.

A death that could have been avoided in the parable, if the father had sent an army... Especially since the tenants killed, stoned, and hurt the previous groups he sent... It only seems logical for the father to send an army.

But instead, he sends his son, by himself, unarmed, and full of mercy...

Sounds familiar hunh?

Our gospel today paints the upside-down kingdom of God... Highlighting the differences of God's love and mercy, to our human responses to hate... By showing us how God meets violence with love...

Which should also sound familiar to our prayer at the start of this sermon. He is an instrument of peace... Where there is hatred, he sows love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union.

Which of course is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus lived among us and showed us what it looks like... to love everyone.

Love that he poured out, even as he was being crucified, by saying Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.

Now that is some radical love. To love all others, even our enemies, even those who have hurt us, or hurt the ones we love...

This is the kind of love that crushes everything else. It crushes death, hatred, evil, and sin...

Love that is the cornerstone that Jesus foretold in our gospel today.

Where evil, hate, and death are nothing against the new creation that is built in Christ's resurrection.

A creation that arcs towards a better future... A better future that is only possible when the fruits of our labor are produced with God's love.

When we live in a way that blesses others... By sowing love over hate, pardon over injury, union over discord, and hope over despair.

Because this is what the world needs... Love and a lot of hope. It has enough of all of that other negative stuff.

But it can be downright terrifying to think about... Sowing love over hate...

How can we do that with all that is going on? The war in Israel & Palestine. The war in Ukraine. Fear for our future. Shootings, violence, and hate.

Which makes this sermon seem like some fantasy reality. Because aren't we supposed to defend ourselves? Aren't we supposed to be realistic in the face of hate and danger?

This is our reality. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to live in a way that sows love over hate.

Because we can start off small, by holding one another in prayer, and by being there for others, living out our call to be a blessing.

And blessings don't need to be anything extravagant... You just need to share some grace, kindness, and love.

Living in a way that bears good fruit... Fruit that produces a better future for all.

Like we sing in our offering song... Let the vineyards be fruitful Lord and fill to the brim our cup of blessing... Because God fills us and blesses us, so that we can offer ourselves to others, so that they too can be blessed.

As it is together that we gather the harvest from the seeds that were sown, in hopes to produce a better future...

And to honor our call to be a blessing, I would like to end with a blessing by Kate Bowler...

Let us pray. "God, seek us out, and find us, and lead us to where hope lies, where your peaceable kingdom will come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Where hope is an anchor dropped into the future. May we feel you pulling us toward it once again" ... Amen.