

**“Let me sing for my beloved”**

**(Proper 15 Year C)**

**Isaiah 5:1-7**

**Psalm 80:1-2,8-18**

**Hebrews 11:29-12:2**

**Luke 12:49-5**

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia on Sunday August 19th 2007 by the Reverend Richard Smiraglia**

Last weekend I was in California. On the Friday afternoon I drove from San Francisco first to Sacramento—to visit my mother—and than back a bit to Davis—where my brother lives. I grew up in California—in the United States Navy—we had addresses in San Diego, Long Beach, and finally Monterey. So once upon a time I was accustomed to California and the way it looks and the way things are done. It is quite different from here. I like to tell my friends and relatives that I have as much culture shock going to California as I do going to Europe.

One thing that I noticed with all that driving was the plethora of signs that say “WRONG WAY.” I guess having spent two decades here I think it is hysterically funny that anybody thinks a sign can tell people where to go .... For many miles before you get to Sacramento the highway is elevated a bit and the flat barren earth around it has just a few green patches here and there—it looked like rice to me and it turned out that was what it was. And it turns out the reason the highway is elevated is that during rainy season it becomes a causeway over the lake that develops there—the lake that presses against the levies that keep Sacramento from flooding—the same levies that were judged just slightly less likely than New Orleans’ to give way very soon. And because I took a wrong turn off the highway I wound up having quite a tour of Sacramento—and there were signs everywhere that running a red light would cost \$351. I almost stopped to take a picture—what a bizarre number for some legislative body to have arrived at.

Well there are signs everywhere and we learn eventually to read them and make sense of them once we learn about their contexts. We understand “WRONG WAY” signs are needed because exits are often adjacent to entrances and a wrong turn could be fatal. We understand that despite the silly number the city is serious about

red-light running. We understand that if it looks like the road is elevated it means flooding is typical. We see things, we make sense of things, and we make decisions about how to behave based on the signs we have seen. Clear enough. And it seems clear enough that God has placed signs around us and among us to help us better to live out our roles as God's children and heirs of God's kingdom. Signs are all around us. Clear enough.

Did you pay attention to that reading from Isaiah? It is a love song. Did you ever love somebody? Did you ever love somebody enough to write a song? It is an act of utmost giving because it is an act of utmost intimacy. Intimacy means risking that which is most sensitive in you, in the hope that your offering will be acceptable to your beloved. It is an awful risk, or maybe I should say it is an awesome risk. If your offering of love is accepted then bliss follows. But if your offering is rejected it really really hurts.

So let's go back to Isaiah. It begins: "Let me sing for my beloved." That is God's voice—saying "listen to me." Where else have we heard God saying that? At the baptism of Jesus, and at the transfiguration of Jesus, of course. At the moments when God's most beloved is offered up to humanity. The next phrase is "my love song." Still God's voice. "Let me sing," God says, "let me sing to the one I love, let me sing the song I wrote, let me sing the song of love I wrote, let me express my intimacy, that my beloved might hear it and love me too."

The song is very pretty. It is about a vineyard. Now think about that—what is a vineyard but a place with the promise of fertility. And what is a place that promises fertility but yet again the most intimate place where souls meet? And so here is God pleading let God sing God's love song to God's beloved written from God's own intimate soul. And to whom do you think this song is being sung? It is meant for us, of course. But it turns out God's effort was for nought. The vineyard yielded spoiled fruit. Instead of love, God received offerings of putrid spoiled grapes--or the human version anyway--bloodshed, anguished cries, selfishness. How must it hurt in God's soul every time one of God's beloved, one of us, turns our back on God?

Jesus said: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" It sounds frightening out of context. But think, what is the fire Jesus brings? It is the fire of love, the fire that burns

in your heart that gives you the brazen guts to write a love song to your beloved. “How I wish it were kindled ...” he says; it is another love song. You see, God’s love is always kindled. God’s love for you is assured. God’s love for you is so awesome that not even your haughty backside can put out the flame of love in God’s soul. God’s love for you is eternal. And so God wishes it worked both ways. God wants us to love God too. And God wants us not to have to work at it quite so much. God wants us to just love each other as though it were second nature, as though it just made sense to do. Just like reading the signs. Just like knowing which way to go, or where the flood will come when it rains or exactly what all of the signs mean in context—God wants us to read the signs of the kingdom too.

What are these signs? Just look up my friends. Do you know the expression “her face fell?” All you have to do to see the signs of the present times, as Jesus puts it, is to look into each other’s eyes. Look and see the good fruit born of your love. Look and see the putrid crop born of your selfish scorn. But above all: look, and keep looking. Paul wrote: “let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” Like Jesus he means, look for the signs of the kingdom. Because my friends the difference between living in the kingdom and living somewhere down the road is that simple—look and see and you will find God’s kingdom already here, in your hearts, in your souls, and if you can do it, you will find it among you too. You can be the fruit of the vineyard in our Psalm—growing so much the vines shade the land and make the desert cool and green—or you can be the putrid fruit that invaders set fire to on the vine.

And the difference is all within you. The difference is you loving God back with all of the power of the love God has for you. The difference is you loving each other with all of the power of the love God has for you. That is how to tend the vineyard. That is how to read the signs. That is how to reach the kingdom. Amen.