

Isaiah 5:1-7

October 2, 2005 – 20th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“What More Could I Have Done?”

✠ **God works hard.** (vv.1,2)

✠ **God takes action.** (vv.3-6)

✠ **The LORD delights to heal.** (v.7)

In the name of Jesus, our hard working Savior and Redeemer, dear garden of God:

“What More Could I Have Done?” Who has never asked that question? You study hard for a test, then find a failing grade anyway. You put yourself out on a project at work, staying late, coming in early, but when all is said and done, someone else takes the credit and you get a pink slip. You love your wife dearly and try to anticipate her every need, but she’s cold, unresponsive, then gone. You respect your husband more than any other man, but he thinks only of himself and runs off with another woman. “**What More Could I Have Done?**” we ask through clenched teeth fighting back the tears.

Painful as they are, our gracious God can use these experiences to bless us with deeper insight and understanding into His loving heart, His deep abiding care for us. You see, “**What More Could I Have Done?**” is God’s question when He looks at us falling into sin or turning away from Him. **God works hard**, but He doesn’t sit on His hands or give up when things don’t go His way. **God takes action**, but it’s not the angry bitterness by which we so often make the problem worse. **The LORD delights to heal**. And by His healing we overcome our own fears and failures. Let’s take a look into the heart of God.

✠ **God works hard.** (vv.1,2)

Shortly before he died in July 1989, a famous actor named Laurence Olivier was asked in an interview by Barbara Walters, “How do you want to be remembered?” She was surprised to hear him say, “As a workman.” “Why is that?” she probed. “Because God is a workman,” answered the famous actor. “And I don’t think anyone can do better than that.”

Do we ever stop to think that God never stops working? As a boy waiting for the bus, I used to wish I could be like all the people in their cars driving wherever they wanted and not having to sit in class all day. It looks much different now that I’m in the car looking at the school buses. Yet work can be a joy, except when plans fall through and leave you wondering, “**What More Could I Have Done?**”

The Holy Spirit’s “Song of the Vineyard” through Isaiah reminds me of how Jesus helps us deal with disasters like hurricanes. The lesson for us is not that we are better, but that God wants us to repent or we too will perish. Jesus told this parable: “*A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’*” (Luke 13:6-9)

Isaiah’s “Song of the Vineyard” is a warmhearted love song about how God looks after His vineyard “*on a fertile hillside*” where He so skillfully planted “*the choicest vines.*” Sunny hillsides are often full of rocks and weeds that must be dug up and cleared away before the expensive plants can finally be placed in the ground. Bright sunshine and cool nights combine with water and soul to produce juicy grapes that yield the finest wine. Anticipating a bumper crop, this determined vintner “*built a watchtower...and cut out a winepress as well.*” This pictures how hard God has been working from all eternity not only to create a perfect world, but then to redeem it by His own bloody sweat and tears when man’s sin brought sorrow, suffering and death. God’s *watchtower* He has garrisoned with pastors and teachers down through the ages to warn His people of coming disaster. God wants a full harvest of souls.

✠ God takes action. (vv.3-6)

It's nearly impossible for us to relate to God's disappointment at what He finds in our hearts and lives again and again after all His hard work. Maybe you might have a car if you worked and saved to buy a car, then came home early from work one day to wash it, wax it, and polish it up. You have a date with a very special lady who hasn't seen it yet. And she's not like other girls you've dated. She really cares about cars and most of all you. You rush through a shower and come out still dripping to find that every bird in the vicinity has paid you a visit for target practice on your car. If it didn't hurt so bad you'd laugh at the absurdity because all the other cars around are clean. But then you look closer and there's no room for smiles at all. Someone took a nail and scratched the length of your shiny new machine. And just to make sure you didn't miss his point, he left the nail sticking out of the hood.

Every illustration limps a bit. This one too. We're not talking about cars, but people. And God is not only concerned about people in this life, but most importantly in the next. He sees eternity before and after time. God knows there is no life without Him. And no one can fault Him for His anger when He goes to work on what He has made. **God takes action.** *"What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."*

Natural disasters are a reminder that God means what He says. Barely 100 years after Isaiah, the LORD God destroyed His own capital city of Jerusalem, His own temple among His chosen nation of Israel. With the feet of the cruel Babylonians He let His vineyard *be trampled* and turned into *a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated* where nothing would grow but *briars and thorns*. He who made the clouds commands them when to rain and when to blow away. God will not let His grace be spurned. And you and I have every reason to tremble in terror at what we deserve for our laziness at work and our selfish lovelessness at home. When we are cold to God's Word, we're like the wife who won't respond no matter what her husband does. We're like the husband who cheats on his wife no matter how much she loves him and gives herself to him. We have wrenched the loving heart of God by our sins.

✠ The LORD delights to heal. (v.7)

When our heads hang low in shame, God's answer to His own question is so sweet and clear. **"What More Could I Have Done?"** "I don't know, God," I would have to answer. "You've done everything good for me again and again, but I've only failed you day by day. I'm sick of myself. I can't imagine how angry you should be." But a gentle hand reaches down to touch your shoulder. Through your tears you look up to see a smiling face. You notice the hands still bear the nail prints where Love gave His all for you. What but love could answer our sins with something like this? The LORD Almighty made us His own vineyard, *"the house of Israel, and the men of Judah."* He calls us *"the garden of his delight."* He still looks for *"justice"* but sees only *"bloodshed"* when we neglect our neighbors and fail to speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves, such unborn babies. God still looks for *"righteousness"* but hears only *"cries of distress"* in our homes and in our dear country. Yet **The LORD delights to heal.** Later Isaiah reports: *"The Lord...saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."* (Isaiah 59:15-17 NIV)

The LORD delights to heal hearts and homes and families. His blood washes away the sins of angry words and pointing fingers. His mercy covers our impatience and selfishness. His sacrifice even pays for all sins of divorce. And yes, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, washes away the sin of abortion. All sins are forgiven in God's sight because **the LORD delights to heal.** Take the medicine of His Word and sacraments. Let His **work** and **action** pay off in you, the garden of God's delight. Amen.