

Don't Get Comfortable

Isaiah 5:1-7

What does it take for you to notice that your house is coming apart? How long does it take for you to realize that your house isn't in order? It happens to all of us. Life gets busy. School and extracurriculars fill up the calendar. You've traveled for work and you never unpacked that suitcase. Next thing you know the dishes are piled up in the sink, toys and mail cover your table and counters, and you can't find your keys amongst the mini messes that have developed throughout the house. Things can slip pretty quickly without you really noticing if you aren't paying attention. We do things like spring cleaning. We freshen up in the fall when we switch our clothes over for cold weather. Things are put together and nice until they aren't. What is the thing that causes you to notice that you need to clean up? Maybe it's when you reach for some clean underwear and can't find any. Maybe it's when you notice the fuzz and dirt on your feet from just walking between the living room and the kitchen. Maybe it's when you lose your youngest kid in the mound of laundry resting against the washer. Okay, maybe it isn't that bad but we've all had these moments. We've all had these wake up calls that get us up on our feet, ready to whip the house back into shape.

What does it take for you to recognize that your house needs some work? Sometimes when we reference our house being in order we mean our families. What does it take for you to notice that your relationship with your kids is drifting? What does it take for you to recognize that your marriage is floundering? We get lazy even in relationships. I think of that analogy with a frog boiling in water. A frog for whatever reason doesn't recognize the temperature change in the water until it is too late. He's cooked. Is that how it is for us? We just don't put in the work. We don't put in the time. We aren't self aware, relationally aware until it's too late. What's the temperature of our closest relationships? What helps us notice when they are struggling? Maybe it's the cold shoulders or one word answers. Maybe it is slamming doors and screaming matches. There are indicators that we should be putting in the work but do we notice them? We've all had these wake up calls that should get us up on our feet, ready to get our affairs back in order. But do we actually see them, hear them or does it end up becoming too far gone before we do anything about it? Can we fix things in time or is it too late?

Isaiah, in our assigned reading for today, writes to a house that has its priorities all out of whack. He warns a people who aren't noticing the gradual changes around them. Isaiah is attempting to be the wake up call that snaps the Israelites out of their apathy, back into a life of faithful

witness and worship. He does this with a parable of sorts. He does this by speaking of a vineyard. I want you to notice, as you look through these seven verses, how quickly things turn. It starts off as a song about a vineyard. It's a vineyard that is well loved and cared for. It's a vineyard that has been nurtured with attention given to every detail. The master of this vineyard loves his work and is inspired by the initial results. He has set up the vineyard to be fruitful, productive and profitable. Not only does he care about it but he's even written a love song to it. But then it turns. What should have been a good crop turns sour. What should have yielded positive results only proved to be a waste of time and in response to this unfortunate news he threatens to tear it all down.

You can almost hear the anger in the once tenderhearted master: "And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." You get the anger. You understand his frustration. He loved this place. He put so much work and energy and time into tending it. He didn't want it to go this way but here we are. Just when you think you've got the space to interpret this love-song-turned-bad, Isaiah tells us plainly what it's about. It's about them. It's about those who are gathered

to hear. The houses of Israel and Judah are a mess. They aren't what God had called them to be, not anywhere close. They had forgotten what it was like to be His people, His treasured possession. They had let things slip for far too long. They had forgotten the care and compassion of their Creator. They had slumped into complacency. Their houses weren't in order. Their houses were out of control and this was the wake up call. Why didn't they see it sooner? What had kept them from noticing? Why didn't they do something to stop it?

It's probably a bit helpful to understand the setting for this uncomfortable confrontation. This prophetic parable is being preached during the Feast of Booths. This isn't really a holiday we celebrate so I don't blame you for not knowing what that is. Actually, it is celebrated at the end of the harvest and this year's remembrance began on Friday and will go until this coming Friday. The Feast of Booths is a festival time where the people of God gather to remember their time in the wilderness. It is a feast because it happens near the end of harvest, which gives cause to celebrate the goodness of God. It is of booths because of the temporary dwellings the Israelites lived in during their 40 year sojourn through the wilderness, out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Like most festivals, the Feast of Booths forces the people to remember how God provides. It is a reminder of where they were and where they are now. It is

a reminder of God's faithfulness through the scarcity. So, as Isaiah shares this song of broken expectations directed at the House of Israel and Judah, these people should be spending their time thinking about what God has done. They didn't even have their booths in order, let alone their houses. They have strayed far from where God has directed them. Even as they go through the motions, celebrating God's faithfulness, they are faithless. They have forgotten what it means to be God's children. They are being warned that they might be too far gone.

The connection for us should be obvious as it smacks us in the face with an inconvenient truth. Are we what God wants us to be? Do our lives reflect the care and attention he has given to us? Clearly, we have a ways to go. Clearly, we have gotten too comfortable. If we are honest with ourselves and allow ourselves to see, we've grown a bit complacent. We've slipped into sin. We've slipped into sinful lifestyles. We've slipped into attitudes and behaviors that aren't pleasing to the Lord. Even as we come to worship, gathered to remember his goodness, we are quite content with the sin we've compartmentalized in our lives. We've gotten way too comfortable. And if this is true then is the threat to the Israelites just as real to us? Will we be uprooted? Overturned? Beaten and broken down? Abused and neglected? Is that our fate? Is that the future that waits for us? The people of God experienced something like that. The

ones that heard the message eventually saw it play out in real time. They were uprooted from their land. Their city destroyed with the temple overturned. They were cast into exile, far from the presence and promises of God. They felt neglected, forgotten as they dwelled under a foreign king in a foreign land. But even as the poem from Isaiah ends today, God's grace does not.

God is still faithful to his promises even when we are not. He still remembers his end of the bargain even when we have long forgotten. He eventually brings these lackadaisical listeners back to the land he's promised them. He keeps the line of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Isaac alive which bears the seed that is Jesus the Messiah. Even as God destroys and uproots, the root of Jesse still survives. Even as the vineyard is trashed and torn apart, the True Vine stays planted safely in the soil. God still grants deliverance to this rotten vineyard. God still provides salvation for a lazy and sinful people. We are still given Jesus. And for us, we see the frustration and anger of the vineyard master taken out on the son of God. For by his wounds we are healed. By his scars we are saved. Jesus is stricken, smitten and afflicted. Through his chastisement we are given peace. Yes, the master of this vineyard does exactly what he promised. But in a twist of fate he does it to his only son so that we can be spared. The bitter punishment that Jesus bore on the cross is exactly the

kind of thing meant for a lazy and sinful people like us and yet here we sit, saved and secure in the holy ark of His church. How great a salvation.

Yet, we know the cycle of sin continues. We know that if we don't pay attention to his word and how it impacts our lives we can slip into complacency again. So please, don't get comfortable. Don't settle for a lukewarm faith bearing sour fruit in the vineyard of His kingdom. We are called to be more, to do more. We are capable of so much more for our master. Just look at how he's created us. Just look at the care and attention he has given each one of us. Look at the way Jesus shields us from his wrath. We aren't uprooted. We aren't knocked down or cast out. We are still here. We are still useful. We are still planted firmly, ready to produce fruit that will advance the kingdom of God. That is true for each one of us today. So wake up. Snap out of your apathy. Don't wait any longer for things to fall further apart. See the wrath of God enacted on Jesus and know that we are spared for so much more. Let's produce fruit for the kingdom of God so that all may know how sweet His gospel of salvation is. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gracious God,

Sorry for the times when we get too comfortable. We have slipped into apathy and sin far too often. Thank you for sparing us our due punishment and instead inflicting it upon your innocent Son, Jesus Christ.

Wake us up to the law and gospel of your kingdom. Spur us on to live as your children. Forgive us when we fail. In Jesus' name. Amen.