A Sermon – Rev. Whitney Bruno – Oct. 4, 2026 – for LCPC - Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-46

"The Fruit of Justice and Righteousness"

I knew my home as a child. I was connected to the rich, black, mud oozing between my bare toes and leaving natural oil slicks in my clothes. I belonged under the buckeye trees, the burr oaks, the magnolia and cottonwood among the jack-in-the-pulpit and boneset. These are the paths my mother ran as a child. These are the walnuts my grandmother planted. I got my mail at the post office my great-grandfather started. This is a sense of place. Of land.

I often get asked what I miss about my birth country or birth state. It is hard to explain the grief over missing family; over leaving a daughter's grave; but there's also the grief of opossums, bull frogs, mulberry and Alleghany blackberry.

I cannot imagine what it is like to move across the globe where the grief of culture, and language, foods and smells compound atop all new plants, all new people, all new ways.

This week, my family and I became Canadian citizens. The ceremony was held online. 92 people represented 23 different countries. People from newborns to the very elderly. Families and singles. A mom with a teen girl. A man in an apartment. A family of five crowded around a Canadian flag. We cut up our IDs - after 10 years of working to get them - for we are no longer permanent residents. We don't have to prove we belong. We swore in English and in French to uphold the crown, the government of Canada, and Indigenous rights and treaties. We watched a video show casing Canada.

Canada - beavers and moose, Banff trees and Nova Scotia houses. Canada - Vancouver Chinese New Year and Toronto Brazilian Carnival. Canada - Acadian fiddlers and Haida carvers. And we heard in Mischif, in Cree, in Inukititut, Ojibwmowin and Innu and Dene and Anishinabemowin, in French, in English - "welcome home." Home. Walking the paths settlers and indigenous made before me. Home. With porcupines and eagles. Home. Under maples and cedar. Home - sandy and rocky under my feet, snowy and wet, dry and smoky, with every night the stars - the most beautiful stars - and the cry of the loon.

That's when I felt the tears.

I have no claim to this land. I can't say my parents grew up here. I can't say my ancestors left behind all the culture and language, plants and people of Europe and began anew here. I can't say my ancestors have been here since Creator created. I have felt like a squatter - neither Indigenous nor settler-descendant but quite literally a modern settler. Current immigrant. "New to Canada" is what the legal term is. Where do I fit? Do I fit? Am I welcome?

Will these trees embrace me? Will these paths know my feet? Will these peoples resent me for taking up limited housing, limited jobs, and limited land? Will these animals come to know I am their sibling and will I ever be... home?

All week I have mused on this concept of home. And our assigned scripture this week is on homes.

In the first reading, someone creates a home. There is a vineyard, a garden, walls to keep the lions and bears out and the toddling human kids and goat kids in. There is fresh water. Wonderful varies of plants are placed in the fertile soil. We're told the plants are actually people, and are a "cherished garden." With all this care, one would expect a good harvest. But instead, the grapes were sour and rotten. The plants produced no justice or righteousness but made violence and grief. And so, the person gives up on the vineyard, for the cherished garden, the beloved people, are destroyed.

God made a home. God expected the people in the home to do good. But instead, they hurt one another. So it can't be called a home anymore.

In the second reading, Jesus picks up the words of Isaiah and continues the story. Imagine a beautiful vineyard and garden again. Imagine a home. Imagine the landowner leases the land, rents it, to tenants and goes away. Later, the landowner sends collectors to gather the landowner's portion of the harvest rent.

But the tenants kill the debt collectors. I wonder why; I know plenty of people who go to great lengths to avoid debt collectors. Especially in the USA, medical debt regularly causes bankruptcy and people try to hide from collectors their car, so they don't lose their job, so they don't lose their rented land, so they don't go without housing. Maybe they have good reason. Is there ever a good reason to murder someone? Jesus presents a lot of questions in a simple story.

The story continues with the landowner sending his son. The landowner thinks the tenants will respect the son. Is this like a crime boss sending in the big guns? Or is this a respect culture where surely the tenants will see the son and know he represents the father and out of respect for the father, will treat the son well? Either way, the tenants figure if they kill the son, then they'll own the land themselves. So they do so. Problem solved.

Jesus asked then, "What will happen when the landowner returns to the vineyard?"

What will happen? The people around Jesus said, "Oh! Oh! The landowner is going to be SO angry! Those rented wretches are going to be put to a miserable death and better tenants will be found!"

But Jesus doesn't say this. He asks us to ask ourselves - what will happen? What happens when someone takes what isn't theirs; or what happens when two different groups claim ownership or use of land; what happens when the treaty made isn't fulfilled?

The people around Jesus assume violence. The tenants do violence and so surely violence will be done to them. I know that fear rumbles through us today. Settlers, and the crown, and the government, have broken and continue to break treaties and understandings with the First Nations. If justice and righteousness is to be done, won't it mean settlers deserve cultural genocide, physical genocide, religious genocide, land theft, use theft, and violence? It's why new immigrants are loathed and feared. Surely

these East Asians and Indians will do to us white Canadians what we did / do to Indigenous peoples.

But Jesus doesn't say this. He says their assumptions of violence, and the old ways of measuring things, is done. No longer do we give an eye for an eye. Someone has to be willing to end the cycles of violence. The cycles of bloodshed and grief. The cycles of stealing home from one another.

Jesus says God has chosen a guide stone, a corner stone, to make a different garden wall. This wall encircles a vineyard with a garden of people who produce the fruit of heaven. The fruit of heaven, recall, is righteousness and peace. The new rock is hard! It causes people to stumble and trip. It crushes others. The new rock is someone choosing to end the cycle of violence. We know Jesus chooses this way. He chooses to meet the crucifixion and death rather than kill the soldiers, start wars, and pay tit for tat.

He chooses mercy. Mercy is unearned forgiveness. Mercy is unmerited kindness. Mercy is choosing to set down our right to revenge.

Mercy is Indigenous peoples saying 'welcome home' to 90 people born in 23 different countries - more settlers when settlers have done them wrong.

Mercy is settler-descended people saying 'welcome home' to people speaking different languages, bringing different cultures, and changing the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant and French-Catholic culture of Canada - challenging majority culture and knowing new-comers threaten the old ways.

Mercy is the tenants who welcome whomever God sends for a harvest of justice and righteousness. When God sends the most honorable - like God's son - there is rejoicing and welcome. When God sends the least honorable - the unnamed slaves and servants - there is rejoicing and welcome. When God sends the loon and sends the mosquito - there is rejoicing and welcome. Justice and righteousness for all. The sweet fruits of heaven for all.

Mercy is us knowing we are tenants. We do not own the land. God does. We are renters. We exist by the mercy, the unearned love, of God. And God asks of us to produce kindness, and end the cycles of violence, for all who come to the garden we're living within.



Welcome home to God's garden, to Earth, to Canada, to this very place and time where the kin-dom of God is available to all who welcome each other - humans and non-human alike- in kindness, in mercy, in love, in the name of God.
Amen.