

Week Twenty Seventh Ordinary Time Year A 2026

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 79; Phil 4:6-9; Mat 21:33-43

From the Prophet Isaiah and the Psalm and Matthew's Gospel, we hear that God is not pleased with what His chosen people have done. They have not honoured Him with their lives. The image used to represent the Israelites in these three readings is that of a 'vineyard'.

In Isaiah the prophet writes that the people of Israel, planted in fertile hills, and tended by a loving God have produced '*wild grapes*',¹ which means that they are inedible, not fit for purpose. They do not taste good.

In the Psalm the vine, has lost its protection, symbolised by its walls, because the people have walked away from God.² We know this because the Psalmist says '*we shall never forsake you again*',³ which is an acknowledgement of sin, and a lack of peace between God and Man

Finally in the Gospel, Jesus accuses those who should have looked after the vineyard have only looked after themselves. These stewards of the vineyard have not allowed the owner of the vineyard – God – to gather any of its good fruit. Instead they have insulted, and made war on God Himself, thinking that they are secure in the vineyard, that it is somehow theirs. At the end of the parable, Jesus says directly to the leaders of Israel : '*Therefore... the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.*'⁴

St Paul in his letter to the Philippians is the odd reading out. There is no mention here of vines or being thrown out of the vineyard. Those three readings are warnings: the letter to Philippians is an encouragement not to fret or mourn and 'not to be anxious about anything' but to appeal to God, through a guarded life, trusting in Christ, doing what is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable... and then Paul says, '*the God of peace will be with you.*'⁵ Translated into the imagery of the other 3 readings, this is how you become a people producing the fruits of vine. This is how you, 'You live in the vineyard': the Kingdom of God.

And now, a vision.

It was very early in the morning, and in that space between waking and sleeping I dreamt.

I was standing in a dried-out landscape. The earth was red-brown, dusty and cracked from a lack of rain. The sky was a featureless, hazy grey. Not far from me I could see a low broken hedge that stretched to my right and left. The hedge like the earth it was rooted in, was dried and lifeless. Not a single leaf.

I started to walk along it, hoping to find a way through. I could look over the hedge, but the view was no different from that which was on my side of the hedge, still, curiosity compelled me to keep looking for a way through. Eventually the hedge made a turn and I continued to follow it to an opening which, although not large, seemed to be a formal

¹ Isaiah 5:4

² Psalm 80:13

³ Psalm 80: 19

⁴ Matt 21:33, 35, 43

⁵ Phil. 4: 6-9 Just read it all.

entrance. I crossed through. I felt empty and distraught. There was still nothing.

Then I saw a very small green shoot, nestled up to a clump of earth. I knelt down beside it and wept over it. 'Is this all that is left', I cried, 'Is this all that is left?' Great sobs issued from my and my tears flood out. After a time, exhausted from mourning, I slept.

Upon waking I saw that I was in same garden I had entered before, only now it was green, a few trees had grown up and offered pleasant areas of shade; the air smelt damp and refreshing.⁶

I became aware of another figure near me.

He was standing close by, watching me. I said 'I am hungry'. He stretched out his closed fist to me. I put out my hand to receive what he held. As he opened his hand, I noticed a large wound on his wrist which was seeping blood. He tipped into my waiting hand a few small seeds. *'Plant these', he said.*

Kneeling I dug a hole in the now moist earth, put the seeds in and covered them over. I waited. After a few minutes a tender leaf began to pierce up from the earth and grow before my eyes. All the while I was conscious of my hunger. The vine grew up healthy and strong, and then beautiful grapes hung heavily from its branches. I plucked a few to eat. Before I could, the stranger placed his wounded hands over mine and said: *'They are not for you. Feed them.'* I followed His gaze and looked over my shoulder. I saw that at the entrance to the garden which I had entered through a ragged queue of people had

started to form. They were dusty, confused and uncertain, their lips parched and their eyes were glazed. Against the lush green of the garden they looked washed out and colourless. I took the grapes and walked to the woman at the head of the scraggly line and pressed the juice from the grapes into her mouth. Immediately she seemed to bloom into the fullness of life, her skin glowed with health and her eyes sparkled.

Looking down to my left and right I could see many people, stretching beyond my vision giving the life of the vine to those who were waiting to come in.

I was in the vineyard, and I was no longer hungry.

⁶ For just a moment I had a vision within my vision and I saw another lush garden, ancient and peaceful, with a man and woman in it, just sitting and talking, delighting in each other's company. That faded and