

*when I awoke dear I was mistaken
and I hung my head and I cried.”*

Have you usually sung this verse as happily as the first one? Have you still been able to dance to a message not as positive as in the first verse?

Then finally is the last verse:

*”You told me once dear
that you really loved me
and no one else could come between
but now you’ve left me
and you love another
you have shattered all my dreams”*

With a catchy, beautiful melody and affirming words “You are my sunshine”, it’s a song that grabs our attention. But at its heart is a sad message: “You have shattered all my dreams.” This is a happy sounding song describing a somewhat disastrous situation. Yet, it is a favourite for many folk. And that’s one of the amazing things about songs; you can have a sad message or one that describes the harsh realities of relationships, but still be able to have people sing and even dance to it in a positive light. I guess people may get the song, but not always its message. And if they do get the message, its impact may be affected by the tune. A sad message to a happy tune might make the message sound not so bad.

Our Isaiah reading is introduced as a song. It's a kind of ballad that starts off about a good friend's vineyard. After all the hard work done by the friend to ensure that it would produce a good crop, the result is failure. I'd like to read the passage from the Message Translation: "I'll sing a ballad to the one I love, a love ballad about his vineyard. The one I loved had a vineyard, a fine well-placed vineyard. He hoed the soil and pulled the weeds, and planted the very best vines. He built a lookout, built a winepress, a vineyard to be proud of. He looked for a vintage yield of grapes, but for all his pains he got junk grapes" (Is. 5:1-2).

Then the song takes a turn whereby the friend or the Lord becomes the singer singing about his own vineyard. In a clever way, the writer draws the audience into the song to consider what the outcome might be. God is now the singer. "Now listen to what I'm telling, you who live in Jerusalem and Judah. What do you think is going on between me and my vineyard? Can you think of anything I could have done to my vineyard that I didn't do? When I expected good grapes why did I get bitter grapes?" (vv.3-4). By putting these questions to the listeners, and to us as readers, the purpose was to invoke a response. It invites a decision; a decision about what conclusions can be drawn from this situation.

The song finally turns from a love ballad into one of judgement and damnation. “Well now, let me tell you what I’ll do to my vineyard: I’ll tear down its fence and let it go to ruin. I’ll knock down the gate and let it be trampled. I’ll turn it into a patch of weeds, untended, uncared for – thistles and thorns will take over. I’ll give orders to the clouds: don’t rain on that vineyard, ever” (vv. 5-6).

I’m not sure how this song might have been sung. I’m not sure if its tune was catchy enough to make people want to sing it in a happy way. I’m not sure if people wanted to dance along to it in spite of its direct and damning message. But I can imagine that it would be difficult trying to sing positively and dance happily to Isaiah’s conclusion: “Do you get it? ... All the men and woman of Judah are the garden he was so proud of. He looked for a crop of justice and saw them murdering each other. He looked for a harvest of righteousness and heard only the moans of victims” (v.7).

These words once again speak against the unloving and unjust treatment of God’s people to one another. And as we have already heard from readings in last few Sundays, such behaviour usually came from those in privileged positions of society; the rich and powerful who sought to satisfy their greed and sense of self-righteousness.

But Isaiah makes it clear that that's not what God had intended. God worked in their life to make them people who would seek to do good and right by each other; instead they resorted to the practices of violence and oppression.

The thing that Isaiah's song of the vineyard and songs like "You are my sunshine" have in common is that they identify how unpredictable and complicated human relationships can be. The singers in both songs appeal to love as the basis of their input toward to relationship, but in the end, experience the unfaithfulness of the one they love. That can happen in life. You can do all you can to try and make your relationship work, but the reality is that people will decide for themselves whether or not to reciprocate your love. People will either affirm the relationship and stay or they will break it and walk away.

In way, that's what Jesus was trying to say in our reading from Luke. It's a very difficult saying by Jesus that conveys a sense of judgement. "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed. Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one house will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against

father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Lk. 12:49-53).

In light of facing his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus spoke these words about the impact upon the relationships of his followers. A decision to make a commitment to follow Jesus also had a bearing on a disciple’s relationship with others. For some it meant leaving behind family and friends as well as jobs and various responsibilities. Following Jesus also meant adopting a belief different to one held by those left behind or separated from.

More often than not, the differences we experience in relationships become the points of conflict. They can cause disputes where people can sometimes flare up in upholding their own judgements. When Jesus said he came to bring “fire”, such a word conveyed a sense of judgement. When people made up their minds to follow him and live their life differently to those they co-exist with, then conflict is sometimes unavoidable.

In our relationships with others there is usually both joy and suffering. This can even happen with people we have a close and loving relationship. Families can share many moments of laughter and fun, but they can at times experience tension and grief. At the extreme, they can even experience deep sense of division and

alienation; and eventually separation. This can happen for various reasons including strongly held differing views on things, infidelity and death.

History has shown us that people have been divided and have even resorted to violence and war because religious convictions. We've seen that in the history of the Christian Church as well as in some of the events around the world today where people are prepared to kill in the name of God.

Yet trusting Jesus and following him was part of seeking first the kingdom of God; a kingdom grounded in the love, justice and righteousness of God. By following Jesus, one would eventually come to know the way of peace rather than violence; of compassion rather than oppression; of building up and enhancing the life of the other rather than destroying.

Despite our reading from Luke conveying the idea that Jesus is the cause of division between people, it also highlights the importance of people's decision for and conviction in Christ. It is so crucial that it somehow goes against the grain of what others expect. For many Jews, believing Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God, as well as promoting his counter-cultural teachings was very divisive. But, as we heard last Sunday, Jesus said that the one who decided to

seek first the kingdom of God and all its righteousness, was the one who made that the most important thing in his or her life. It would be a treasure that had an eternal value that was not confined to but could transcend loyalty to family, and to state or religious authority.

Not every one will agree or approve of your decision to follow the way of Jesus Christ. But it doesn't mean your relationship with them has to be a contentious or difficult one. That fact you are a disciple of Christ should encourage to express more with them love and justice which are principles of the kingdom of God. Just because someone disagrees with you doesn't mean you can't still love them.

Just as most love songs convey both the good and bad side of human relationships, so too does our life of faith. Both our Isaiah and Luke readings describe the reality of the challenges that people of God or people of faith face in the way they relate with God and others.

I remember a song, well-known to me during my Sunday School days. Perhaps you might it too. It reflects the sense of purpose and joy of the Christian life, but realising also the challenges and difficulties it presents in terms of relationships with others. It goes something like this:

I have decided to follow Jesus (3x)

No turning back, no turning back

The cross before me, the world behind me (3x)
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, still I will follow (3x)
No turning back, no turning back.

Our life in general is one mixed with both positive and negative events. In many ways, that is also the reality of our life of faith. Therefore, the songs of faith we sing reflects that. We may sing of a triumphant and victorious Jesus as king in light of a suffering and crucified servant. And in spite of the challenges we face in our various relationships with people, we can still sing our songs of hope and trust in Christ.

Song –

He came singing love,
He lived singing love,
He died singing love,
He arose in silence,
For the love to go on,
We must make it our song
You and I be the singers.

He came singing faith...

He came singing hope...

Amen.