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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

It has always been my opinion that my wife, Debbie, has something of a green thumb. Throughout our 36 years of marriage we have always had live plants living with us in our home. And since we actually purchased our first home we have also always had plants and flowers growing outside our home as well. At the beginning of our marriage we also had a vegetable garden which Debbie loved to tend.

But then, first one, then two, then three little boys were added to our family and we became busier and busier. And Debbie and I found that tending a vegetable garden became more and more difficult in the midst of all our other family activities. So the last year we had a vegetable garden I said to Debbie, "Let's go with a new plan. I have an idea that maybe working to weed and cultivate a vegetable garden is more about how the garden looks than it is about the success of the garden. Let's try," I said, "not weeding the garden this year and see if it doesn't produce just as well."

I don't know if you have ever tried planting a garden and then not caring for it along the way. But I am here to confess that it doesn't really work. What we experienced that year was a garden gone wild. And we decided that year that having a vegetable garden was simply beyond what we could do given the other requirements of our time and energy in this life. We haven't had a vegetable garden since.

A garden gone wild. It is the image that the prophet Isaiah uses for the people of God in our First Reading for this morning from Isaiah the fifth chapter. A garden gone wild. In the case of this reading, however, it isn't a garden gone wild but rather a vineyard gone wild. The Lord, says Isaiah, has planted a vineyard. And the Lord expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." And the Hebrew word behind the words translated in English here as "wild grapes" is actually "bitter fruit", or, better yet, "stinking fruit". The point is that the vineyard the Lord has planted does not yield the lush, sweet fruit which the Lord hoped that it would yield.

In this reading the vineyard gone wild is an image of the people of God. And it is actually not an unusual image for the people of God in the Bible. For God has created humankind to live in a faithful relationship with him. And the Bible is consistent in proclaiming the message that humankind have not lived in that faithful relationship to the degree that God desires. Rather, God's relationship with his people has been characterized by bitterness for God. Humankind have found themselves in bondage to sin, unable to free themselves.

In this text God's judgment upon the people of God for their faithlessness is severe. "And now I will tell you," says the Lord, "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, at it shall be over grown with briars and thorns... The Lord vows to abandon his vineyard that is the people of God.

The good news is that we do not have only this passage from Holy Scripture, but rather we have the whole Bible. And from reading the whole Bible we know that God has, indeed, not abandoned his people. In fact, God has relented and remained faithful to his nature which is to stand by his people, come what may. God's love is a steadfast love which refuses to give up on the people of God.

So it was in due time that when God saw that the people of God would continue to fail to live in the kind of relationship with him which he desired, it was necessary for God to adopt a new tactic. And that tactic was to be characterized by grace, mercy, and forgiveness. So we know, from the rest of the Bible, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, to pay the price for the consequences of the faithlessness of humankind, in order that whoever would believe in him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

It is profound divine irony that one of the very ways this grace, mercy, and forgiveness would be made available to humankind is through the fruit of the vine, the grapes used to provide the wine of Holy Communion. The image of bitter fruit which is used in Holy Scripture to describe humankind is transformed into the sweet fruit of Holy Communion that is actually used by God to transport the very presence of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus into the hearts and lives of the people of God.

Here is the miracle again this morning. As we drink from the drink that is made from the fruit of the vine, we drink Christ himself who is present in and with the bread and the wine. And as Christ comes to us in the bread and in the wine we are declared to be, for his sake, the faithful people of God that God has called us

to be. And we, then, are transformed in God's eyes into the sweet fruit that he has planted us to be.

Dear friend in Christ, you know the ways in which you are less than you would like to be in relationship with God. Come to the table this morning. Come to the table with a repentant heart. In the fruit of the vine receive the Lord Jesus, crucified also for you. Eat and drink of the sweet fruit of forgiveness and grace. And depart from this place in confidence in your relationship with our good and gracious God. Amen.