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Fifth Sunday of Easter – John 15:1-8

Introduction: Being with Christ is Quite Enough!

This Sunday's reading from the Gospel of John is part of Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper – a series of last-minute instructions as to how his disciples should live when he is gone. Essentially, the Gospel centers around the type of close relationship that should exist between Jesus and his followers- both then and now in 2021 among us.

By using the graphic metaphor of the vine and the branches which was used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe Israel's intimate relationship with Yahweh, Jesus describes himself as the true vine – or rather as the main stem or trunk of the vine. On the vine there are many branches. Some of these branches are laden with fruit, while others may not produce any fruit at all. But even those branches which bear fruit will need to be pruned so that they will produce even more fruit. No branch can bear fruit at all unless it is part of the vine.

This metaphor—which makes more sense in a mostly agricultural working environment rather than our own urban setting—clearly applies to our relationship with Christ. Separated from him, we are unable to bear much fruit. He is the source of all our life and of every good thing we do. “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” That sentence definitely speaks to us today! And—sadly—a branch that becomes separated from the trunk that is Jesus will wither and die. A frightening warning indeed.

It is interesting to note that the word “remain” (or as it is often translated, “abide”) appears ten times in this passage to illustrate the mutual indwelling and continuous union with Jesus. This is clearly not a relationship just for key moments in our lives. It is an on-going and sustained relationship for over the long haul on our faith journeys.

Furthermore, this Gospel passage points to the regular need for pruning if we—as followers of Jesus the Vine—are serious about our good works done in faith. Bottom Line: Pruning is growth.

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the *Gospel of John 15:1-8*.

What word or words caught your attention? (Notice the use of “remain” or “abide” in this passage.)

What in this passage comforted you?

What in this passage challenged you?

Further Reflections and Questions:

Jesus is telling us that the very core of our existence is to be connected with him. He invites us to “abide,” to rest, to stay, to remain in him. *Do I have a sense of this abiding in him? Where can I do this?*

Another way to word this: “A beautiful question for us Christians is this: *Do I abide in Jesus or am I far from Jesus? Am I united to the vine that gives me life or am I a dead branch, that is incapable of bearing fruit, giving witness?*” Pope Francis –

We can bear fruit for God in a way that nobody else can. *What is your unique way?*

I need to learn that I don’t have to be “always on the go.” The grapes mature happily, simply by being on the vine. They don’t have to work – to blossom and ripen. So simply being with the Lord is more than enough!

The term “to abide” was music to the Hebrews who had been nomads and exiles. They longed for a place in which they could rest permanently. Jesus offers, not a country, but his self, for this abiding. Relationship, not place, is what matters. I thank God that even though my life is always changing, Jesus is my home, my permanent resting place.

Pruning is a necessary part of a branch’s growth on the vine. It is always painful. But the act of pruning is an act of trust. For the pruned branch will bear abundant fruit. *What parts of my life need to be pruned away?*

This metaphor of vine and branches can also be applied to the Christian community. As a Christian Community, where do we need to be pruned?

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