

Vine and Branches; God and Us

King of Glory Lutheran Church

April 27-28, 2024

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Year B: Easter 5: **John 15:1-8**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Our Synod is a living, breathing and rich example of this text. Our local congregation is a living, breathing and rich example of this text. For there is mutuality in the relationship we have with God. Not mutuality in the sense of being equal, but in the sense that we are connected. Jesus is connected to God the Father, we are connected to Jesus, we are connected to one another. We cannot do the work of mission and ministry alone. We must remain in contact.

The Living and Risen Lord Christ who abides with and in us, give you grace and peace this day. Amen.

I'm certain that you've seen a great movie or attended a fabulous concert and you want to tell all your friends about it. You do your best, yet because they weren't there with you, they don't share exactly the same feelings.

I want to share just a little bit of Synod Assembly with you...knowing you weren't there...wishing I could ask all of you to attend one...realizing that you might think it's an event only for church nerds.

This text about Jesus being the true vine and we the branches was deeply visible at our three-day church assembly. We gathered around the Font, around Word and Table, we gathered with the Risen Christ. Imagine two huge hotel ballrooms filled with 402 voting members of our Rocky Mountain Synod: clergy and lay voting members from Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas. On

each table they had a candle and a living branch, flowering, despite the now chilly weather.

Reports were given about the successes of Bishop Jim Gonia's last twelve years, and about the successes of the Synod staff. Ministries, programs and themes were lifted up as we were reminded that always, we are Church – Better Together.

It is one theme of the Easter Season, that under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, without whom we neither live, or move or have our being; in being connected to Him, we now carry on the mission and ministry of the Church. We simply cannot do it alone. We never do it alone. We, as disciples with our God, do this work of ministry together.

Our congregation is also a living, breathing and rich example of this text. God has called each of us, individually, to be a collective body. The Body of Christ here at King of Glory. Each of us with our varied gifts and skills are needed here in this moment of time. We don't do ministry alone. We accomplish it connected to Jesus, the Vine. But we also accomplish ministry as teams; members holding a similar vision or passion or delegated task. We look to one another to see that task through. Choir members; the sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. The Altar Guild; those who set and serve from the Lord's Table, taking turns each weekend of the month. Never a single person doing ministry alone, but in God's presence and with others.

Furthermore, many people here have relationships that are very important. Friendships have deepened and grown over the years. If there is a need, simply pick up the phone and someone from church will be at your door. The vine from 2919 grows out, winding its way from house to house and heart to heart. We don't need to and do not, live life on our own. From Jesus the vine, we've grown branches one to another. If you don't feel like you have that connection yet, bravely reach out a hand, or step out in faith to another branch. Another person.

In scripture, God's people Israel, had always been known as a vineyard, a vine of God. Yet, in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, this vineyard was always disappointing to God. The grapes had grown wild, they were untamable, yielding bad fruit.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine." Jesus is making the claim, that He, God's Son, is now the fulfillment of the people of Israel. He is not going to repeat the pattern of being an unwieldy, overgrown, wild vine. Jesus is the obedient and perfect Son,

intimately connected to God the Father. Just as Jesus is connected to God, we are the branches of Jesus the Vine. We are intimately connected to Jesus.

We all know what dead trees look like. The bark begins to fall off, the leaves turn brown and die. Likewise, we know what healthy trees look like. For example this ash tree out in front of the church, by the sidewalk into the octagon, is simply spectacular. It grows each year, the branches are living hosts to many a singing bird and it is the perfect shape.

I am the vine and you are the branches. Jesus is encouraging us to stay connected to Him, so we might remain healthy, strong, and bear fruit. I hear this text as Law and Gospel. Law because without God we can do nothing and at times we decide to stray. Most of our human relationships can wax and wane through the seasons of life. We might feel like our relationship with God, waxes and wanes also.

It's Gospel because we are already connected to Jesus. Jesus is saying to us, look at the vine. Look at how the branches are connected. They already are connected. God has claimed us in baptism and holds onto us no matter the season. *Abide in me as I abide in you. There is mutuality in the relationship we have with God. Not mutuality in the sense of being equal, but in the sense that we are connected.*

God abides in us. That doesn't make us God, but God's Spirit and power lives within us just like the vine gives life to the branches.

We, in turn, are to tend to this relationship (pointing up and down) like we tend to our other relationships (pointing side-to-side). In order to bear fruit in the corner of the world where God has planted us to grow, we need to work at staying connected to Jesus the living-giving Vine.

How do you and I do that? We worship, we pray, we put a time in our schedules to sit quietly with God. We have Bible study and conversation with other Christians. Our faith is strengthened by intentional practices which keep us close to the vine rather than growing wild here there and everywhere.

Look at it this way. A person who lives with alcoholism, knows that he or she must 'work the program' in order to not drink. They go to meetings to be around others who are not drinking and staying sober. They meet with their sponsor to have conversation when temptation or living a 'dry' life is challenging. They connect to their higher power for daily strength. An alcoholic knows they simply cannot continue to live life, on their own.

People of God, you and I cannot do this thing called life on our own. We are already connected to Jesus the Vine – praise God. May we abide in Him as He abides in us. Amen.