

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

We have a couple of grape vines on our patio in the back yard.

They were a gift from a friend who was redoing her yard and didn't want them anymore.

I put them in wooden containers and put a lattice gateway between them so they would have something to climb.

The first year, they didn't do much – just getting used to their new surroundings, I thought.



The next year they were lush and full – racing up and over the trellis and we even got some grapes.

We were really looking forward to last year – grapes and everything – and we got nothing – wimpy vines – a couple of clusters that never developed and rotted away.

So this winter I was instructed to cut everything back – prune off all the grapevine – and take it back to the main branches – in preparation of pulling them out and replacing them with something else.

But before I got them pulled out – they sprouted - strong green branches are making their way up the trellis with lush green leaves.

Hmm, maybe there's something to this vine and pruning the branches that Jesus talks about in the Gospel reading.

In any event the grapes have earned themselves a year's reprieve – so we will see what happens – for now we have lovely green branches – but will there be grapes? Time will tell.

And so it is to VINES and BRANCHES that we turn our attention today.

I. Vine and Branches

A. Jesus and his Disciples are gathered in the Upper Room for supper on the night before he died.

1. And as part of that evening, Jesus gives a four-chapter-long “after dinner speech” scholars have come to call the “Farewell Discourse.”

2. Our Gospel reading comes from that “Discourse” as Jesus says to his Disciples:

- *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.*

3. For the health of the vine itself, the gardener has to cut away the dead wood so that the energy of the vine can go toward growth and bearing fruit.

4. Jesus goes on to say: *“Abide in me as I abide in you.*

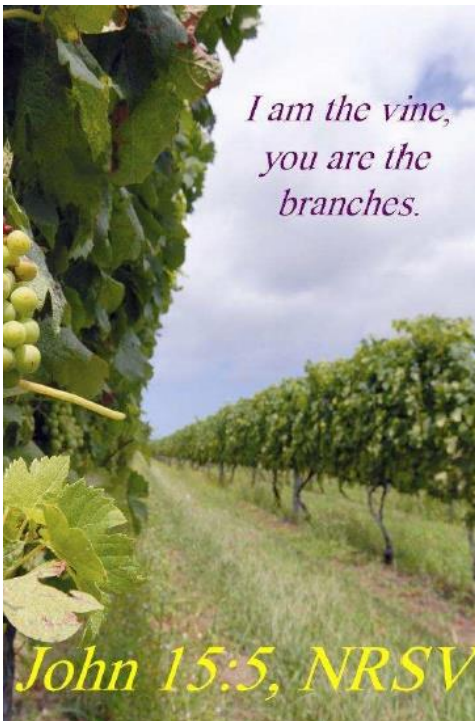
- *Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.*

- ***I am the vine and you are the branches.** Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*

5. As the vine, Jesus is the source of life for the disciples and us.

6. So, then, to be followers of Jesus, WE are to **abide** in him.

7. **Abide** is not a word we use much anymore – the dictionary definition means “to stand fast; to remain” – but I like the archaic definition – no surprise there – it’s “to stay or reside in”.



9. So to **abide** with Jesus means to stay with him or LIVE in him – much like that VINE and its BRANCHES.

B. As Jesus so rightly points out, a branch will not last very long without the VINE and the life-giving nourishment it provides.

1. Jesus was probably talking about vines and grapes, but when I think of vines, I think of the BOYSENBERRIES in my back yard.

2. They shoot out **runners** all over the place, and sometimes the runners embed themselves and become new vines – but if I’m trying to bend one of those vines back around the trellis to train it where I want it to go, and IT BREAKS and comes away from the vine, it’s not going to give me any fruit; it’s only going to wither and die.

3. Jesus says the same is true of OUR **relationship** with HIM.

4. Unless we are connected to Jesus – the VINE – the source of our spiritual nourishment – we will only wither and die.

5. As one Scholar put it:

- *“The followers of Christ are like branches of the vine that have no spiritual life apart from the vine.*

- *Their life flows into them from the source, Jesus Christ, who exists for the life of the branches attached to him.*

- *Mutual indwelling – **abiding** – is the means of life and productivity for the disciples.*

- *To detach from the fellowship of Christ Jesus is to withdraw and die, to wither like a dead branch.”* (Synthesis 5/3/15)

C. And the reason the branch stays attached to the vine – the reason we stay connected to Christ – is to FLOURISH and BEAR FRUIT.

1. For a Grape or a Boysenberry vine – the reason for their existence is to bear the fruit of that vine.

2. And for us, the reason is the same; we stay connected to Jesus so that, like the vine, we too may be nourished with the **spiritual energy** we need to BEAR FRUIT.

3. And what is the FRUIT we bear – the FRUIT of **God's love**.

II. God is Love

A. We read about this LOVE in our NT lesson:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

1. The reading goes on to say: *“God is love, and those who abide in LOVE abide in God, and God abides in them.”*

2. There's that word again – **abide** – *“to stay or reside in”*.

3. So WE demonstrate our LOVE for God by sharing God's LOVE with others – and in so doing God then lives and thrives IN US.

4. God's **very nature** is LOVE – and if we are made not only in the image of God, but OF God, then God's nature is part of our nature and that nature is love.

5. That's what Jesus came to show – **that God's nature is Love** – not fear, not appeasement – but LOVE.

6. And Jesus demonstrated this all the way to the cross – as John's letter states: *“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

7. That's God's very being – LOVE – and when we share that love, we are living into our relationship with God – and **bearing the fruit** of our lives.

B. It was that LOVE that empowered **Philip** in our reading from Acts to go and share with the Good News about Jesus with the Ethiopian Eunuch.

1. This was obviously a stranger, a foreigner; he didn't look like Philip – he didn't act like Philip – he was certainly from a different background.

2. Philip had every reason in the world to let him pass by – but he didn't.

3. He ran up to him and offered to share what he knew about Jesus, and in so doing was sharing the **fruits of God's love**.

4. And in the end, he brought a new branch into the vine of Christ.

III. All about Relationship

A. For you see, it's all about relationship – there's that THEME again.

1. If we are to ABIDE in God's love – we can't do it alone – we need to be part of a community to encourage us and help us grow.

2. The story is told of a village pastor who went to visit one of his missing sheep.

3. As the two sat by the fire, enjoying a cup of tea, the absent parishioner talked all about his reasons for not coming to church.

4. "I experience God all around me," he said. "I find God in nature, sitting under a tree, or looking at a majestic landscape.

- "In fact," he said, "I can find God as much on the golf course as I do in church."

5. The old Pastor, didn't say a word.

- He simply picked up the fire tongs and lifted a hot glowing ember from the fire and set it on the hearth.

6. The two sat in silence, watching the glowing ember, grow darker and darker, and darker until it finally winked out.

7. Then the Pastor picked it up again and returned it to the fire, where it once again began to glow.

8. “Point made,” said the man, “I’ll see you on Sunday.”

B. It is all about relationship – we can’t do it alone.

1. It’s all about our relationship with God, and
- our relationship with one another.

2. That’s what we **HAVE** to be about – here – today and every day.

3. When they interview people seeking a church, they say what they are looking for is an experience that is **AUTHENTIC**, one that helps people to **deepen their ENCOUNTER with God**, and deepen that relationship, that they may **abide with God**.

4. That’s what we try to do around here.

5. And that’s what we will be looking to do in the days and weeks ahead as we explore what it means to be St. Columba’s in this new space and time – post COVID.

C. If we **abide** with God – if we are so **CONNECTED** that’s God’s very Spirit is coursing through us like sap in a vine – we will have the power to do the work that God calls us to do;

- but apart from God, we can do nothing.

1. We glorify God by using the best talents we have and are enabled by the power of Christ abiding in us to serve others in love.

2. Indeed, as it is said, one who does not love a fellow disciple whom they **HAVE** seen cannot truly love God whom they **HAVE NOT** seen.

3. “God is love” and through this love we abide in God and God in us – and we can bear much fruit.

Conclusion

Abide in God's love that God's love may abide in you, and that you may bear the FRUIT of that love.

Jesus reminds us: "*I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*"

Ask Jesus for what you need to help you to grow closer to him, and be more fruitful.

And then show forth that love in your life, as we continue to work to deepen our ENCOUNTER with God.

Prayer

I close today with the blessing **Bishop Anderson** would offer wherever he would visit, based on today's reading:

Chant:

God is love – and those who abide in love – abide in God – and God in them.

AMEN.