

**I Am the Vine, You are the Branches —**

**Rev. Denise Stone**

**Text: John 15:1-8**

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<sup>1</sup> “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> I 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. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.<sup>i</sup>

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

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This week’s text, like last week’s where Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, is full of imagery and layers of meaning.

In today’s Gospel text Jesus uses a gardening analogy to explain his relationship with God, with us. Jesus calls himself

the True Vine. God is the master gardener. Jesus' disciples/followers are the branches.

Also, like last week, the imagery Jesus uses would have been VERY familiar to the readers and hearers of John's Gospel. They would have been familiar with both the imagery of the growing and the tending to vines. They would have already understood from Old Testament connections that Israel considered herself to be God's vineyard with God as the gardener. The first hearers and readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament passages that compared Israel and Israel's leaders to vineyards that did not produce good fruit.

There is a good chance, since many of you have been connected to church for several years, that you are also familiar with this text and the imagery Jesus uses of the Vine and the Branches. If you are a gardener, some of the applications will make perfect sense to you.

I am not a gardener. I can keep houseplants alive, but I really don't know much about gardening in general and growing grapes in particular (assuming Jesus is talking about grapevines). I had to do a little study to understand more fully some of the metaphors that Jesus is drawing on here.

One of the things I learned was that for fruit production to be at a maximum, outlying branches are cut off and near-to-the-vine branches are cut back some – or pruned – because the branches closest to the vine produce the best fruit.

With the many varied applications that the metaphor of fruit/vine growing, there is much that can be unpacked in these few 8 verses.

I would encourage you, to take some time this week and re-read this passage, see for yourself what Jesus is trying to teach us.

For this morning, I would like to focus on the second half of our passage. In verses 4-8, Jesus says,

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> I 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. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

To give a slightly different take on this text, I would like to share these verses with you from Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*.

<sup>4</sup> “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

<sup>5-8</sup> “I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.”<sup>ii</sup>

Verse 4 is particularly intriguing. <sup>4</sup> “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.”

Live in me, make your home in me.

This is what being a follower of Jesus is like – being at home.

When I think of “home” – I think of the house I grew up in and the memories of family. When I think of “home” – I think of the house where I live with my family. When I think of “home” – I am content in a way that no other place can provide.

Being at “home” with Jesus is even more than that sense of contentment, it is also recognizing our utter dependence on Jesus.

In our western world, society puts a premium on independence and the drive for measurable, worldly success. In the world of our faith, however, the focus is on dependence and interdependence. We are called to be completely dependent on Jesus for our life and direction. We are to be completely interdependent with other followers of Jesus with whom we worship and serve God.

Jesus tells us in the second half of verse 4, “In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.”

For us as followers of Jesus Christ, we must all be joined to the vine. We cannot do the things Jesus directs us to do unless we are in Christ and Christ is in us.

Each person gathered here today is part of the vine and the branches. While this sounds individual, and part of it is, it is also very communal. Jesus is the vine; WE are the branches.

We are joined TOGETHER with Jesus. We are to serve TOGETHER with and for God.

Are there things we can do on our own to serve and worship God? Yes, there are. However, we can only do so much on our own. And we can do nothing without being first and foremost connected to Jesus.

As we are gathered here today, in-person and online, we are invited to join together in recognizing our dependence on Jesus Christ for all that we have and are. We are invited to join together in recognizing our interdependence one with another in our worship of and service for God.

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In a few moments, we will have the opportunity to share Holy Communion. This table is set by Jesus, not by me or this church. Jesus invites you to make your home in him and to allow him to transform you, us, into the followers and community of followers he intends for us.

As we prepare our hearts and minds to share in communion, let us sing the hymn, “I Am the Vine,” continuing to consider what Jesus, being the True Vine, means for us and our lives in Christ.

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<sup>ii</sup> The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.