

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER April 28, 2024

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. 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.

SERMON

Jesus words here were meant bring comfort and courage. How did we managed to misconstrue them as a "shape up or ship out" speech?

You know the expression "read the room"...a way of reminding people to speak or not speak in a way befitting the situation? The room Jesus is reading is the Upper Room. He has washed feet and commanded his followers to love each other. Judas has already bailed on the group having treachery and a few coins of blood money on his mind. The others have been squabbling about who should be second in command. Everyone knows the Romans and the some of the religious leaders want Jesus out of the way and who knows what fate has in store for his followers.

Here, Jesus speaks about who his followers are and where their source of life and vitality comes from. There's not much time allowed for sweating over whether we're good little branches or not. Jesus words are present tense. He says he IS the vine and we ARE the branches...not a goal we aspire to, but the thing we are because he has made it so. It's only natural unconnected branches wither...again

Jesus assures his squabbling, scared, sad, and spun up followers that they ARE connected to the source of vitality; Just as Jesus, the Word made flesh is connected to the one he calls the Father; the creator of all things.

The first to hear John's Gospel no longer had a Temple and their sacred city had been pillaged. Jesus words are for them too. You ARE the branches, drawing your vitality from the very source and ground of being; God!

Isn't it great that churches don't ever worry about their futures or whether they're making a difference or not? Isn't it great we have it all figured out? NOT! But the words are for us too. Our circumstances aren't all that different from Jesus' disciples or from those first hearers of John's Gospel. Jesus continues to be that conduit of life and vitality for us and we bear fruit.

What sort of fruit? It might take lots of forms and it seems to me it comes down to love. God so loves the world. Jesus commands us to love our neighbour. Generations following write what becomes scripture saying loving our neighbour is how we love God. The only possible way such love is possible is being connected to its source. And Jesus' words aren't future tense or conditional on whether or not we shape up or get our act together. For all the times Jesus says I AM...this last time he also says "you are". I AM the vine. You ARE the branches. Those words might well get to the core of what it means to be Easter people; we're grafted into the love of God so that we might love our neighbour. As the writer of First John puts it, we love because God loved us first. THAT is the room we're in. THAT is the word Jesus speaks to us in this room.