

April 27-28, 2024  
Fifth Sunday of Easter

All Saints Parish, Syr. NY  
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Again, Jesus uses metaphors that the disciples are familiar with when he begins to preach about the vine and branches. What might be the message? As I was preparing this reflection, the one word that kept coming to me was CONNECTION. What about connection? Well, one way to understand this is the connection of The Trinity.

- a. Abba God plants the seed – God is the ultimate gardener helping the vine to strengthen and grow.
- b. It can be said that Jesus is the vine...with expert care the vine grows stronger and has more vitality. It is from the vine that the branches sprout.
- c. The Spirit, the Sanctifier is the life force for growth. It is the sun and the water needed for the branches to produce the fruit. We are the branches that are connected to Jesus. The strength of our relationship with Jesus produces the fruit...and the fruit is what we heard in the second reading today.... “Love one another as we are commanded and we will remain connected to Abba.” So, it is through the connectedness of the Trinity that we are drawn into this relationship that produces the fruit.

This metaphor naturally flows into the second area of connectedness... relationship with each other. Sometimes these connections are fairly easy and sometimes they require more thought and consciousness. There are connections with family, friends, and in the broader sense, connections with our brothers and sisters who are a different color, have different beliefs, come from different backgrounds, and all who share this planet with us.



Before we can make these connections in a healthy way, we need to know ourselves and be comfortable in our own skin. We need to appreciate our own ordinariness, our gifts, who we are becoming...and allowing ourselves to be deeply loved by God. Dr. Robert Wicks, in his book, Touching the Holy, says, “to have healthy relationships and connectedness with others we must be clear about our relationship with ourselves. This relationship determines how we will deal with others and the world.”

How one goes about doing this could be a day- long workshop! What it boils down to is if we can appreciate the presence of God in ourselves, as we have been created, we will be more open to finding God in others as they are....and, as we are commanded, “love our neighbor as ourselves.... even if they are different, alien, or the enemy. This thought was brought home to me last week as I was reading the petitions and we prayed for the “3<sup>rd</sup> person killed in the shoot- out” as well as the two fallen officers.

For a nano- second, I was taken aback. Then I realized, why NOT pray for the shooter or the rapist or the terrorist and their families? In Abba’s eyes do they become lesser human being not worthy of our prayers? THIS is the fullness of the fruit we are called to bear.

In many parables Jesus taught, we hear that same message over and over again.....the importance of relationship and loving others as ourselves. Sometimes I can almost hear Jesus saying to Abba, “I keep trying to tell them...I have tried so many ways....do you think they will ever hear me?” Abba’s response....”someday, Jesus....someday...”

E.J. Rutter in Give Us This Day, writes: ”surely acts of kindness are seeds planted by the spirit to awaken us to the goodness inherent in one another.” These many acts of kindness were so blatant these last couple weeks as people in Syracuse and the surrounding areas came together to offer support and love in so many ways to the families of the deceased officers. These many acts of solidarity and kindness were also seen when the Ukraine was bombed; when we support our brothers and sisters in Somalia and the Congo with gifts and financial aid.... And when we are connected to our brothers and sisters in Israel and Palestine with our weekly prayer to Mary.....and so much more we could list.

Yes, we are indeed, all connected with each other.... responding in these grace-filled times with the fruits we have cultivated through our interconnectedness with Abba and each other. Joyce Rupp tells us this grace is ever present just waiting to be tapped! Grace has a long shelf life... and no expiration date! And when we are aware and tend to this grace and allow it to enter our lives this brings motivation, courage, insight and guidance, whatever our spiritual growth requires, including the indispensable fruits of the Spirit.

So, the gifts required for our love and interconnectedness with others are already available to us. But we need to tend to and be ever mindful of that branch. And what about that pruning? What does this mean in relation to our connections?

Pruning requires the removal of these useless buds that still consume life and energy...but no fruit. What needs to be tended to, pruned, removed, or given up for our branches to be energized? In the first reading we hear of Saul, after his conversion, arriving in Jerusalem to teach with the disciples. They were afraid of him because of his former denial of Christ's teachings. Barnabus had to rescue him and explained that God had visited him and "pruned" him of his former ways before he was accepted as a disciple.

We can also see throughout scripture that many who followed Jesus needed to prune some of their ideas, thinking, or lifestyles to follow Jesus. Zaccheus left behind concerns of what others thought of him, Mary left security behind, Peter had to give up the desire to be perfect, the tax collector left behind strong ambition, success and power, the Samaritan woman left behind doubts about her self-worth...and the list could go on. What, brothers and sisters, are we being asked to prune in our own lives so our branches can become more robust and more connected to God and each other?

This time of year offers much opportunity for reflection in nature as we are still "eastering" and seeing new life all around us. I would suggest to each of us when we are out taking that walk Fr. Fred spoke of last week, to observe some of the bushes, vines, and trees as they are coming to life. Are some just beginning new life? Do some need pruning? Are they full of life? Are you already seeing some of the fruits of their growth? And how is this process speaking to you in your own spiritual journey?

I would like to close with a poem by Joyce Rupp that spoke to me about these connections. It is titled "A Springtime Prayer" from her book, Out of the Ordinary. We can pray together...

*Ever-renewing and energizing Creator,  
Come, stir in my dormant spiritual limbs (branches).  
Wake up my tired prayer, revive my weary efforts of care. Sing hope into my  
discouragement.  
Wash my dusty, drab attitude with the cleansing rains of your vision.  
Go deep to my roots and penetrate my faith with the vibrancy of your grace.  
Shake loose the old leftover oak leaves of my tenacious ego-centeredness. (prune)  
Coax joy to sprout from my difficulties. Warm the buds of my relationships so they  
bloom with healthy love.  
Clear out my wintered debris with the wild breeze of your liberating presence  
(grace).  
Nudge me, entice me, woo me, draw me to you.  
I give you my trust and my gratitude as you grace my slowly thawing spirit. (new  
life)  
Light-filled Being, my Joy, my Hope, let the greening (growth) in me begin!*

**AMEN!**

