

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021



Introduction

This Sunday's image of how the risen Christ shares his life with us is the image of the vine. Christ the vine and we the branches are alive in each other, in the mystery of mutual abiding described in the gospel and the first letter of John. Baptism makes us a part of Christ's living and life-giving self and makes us alive with Christ's life. We are sent out to bear fruit for the life of the world.

Thanksgiving for Baptism

You may want to have a small bowl of water available to remind you of your baptism!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,
for these waters where you make us new,
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.
We bless you, risen Christ,
that your Spirit comes to us
in the grace-filled waters of rebirth,
like rains to our thirsting earth,
like streams that revive our souls,
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.

Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear.
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.
Send us companions on our journey as we share your life.
Make us one, risen Christ.
Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life.
To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 385 / LBW # 144

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Psalm: Psalm 22:25-31

- ²⁵From you comes my praise in the great assembly;
I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the LORD.
- ²⁶**The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts live forever!**
- ²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
all the families of nations shall bow before God.
- ²⁸**For dominion belongs to the LORD, who rules over the nations.**
- ²⁹Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship;
all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the LORD.
- ³⁰**Their descendants shall serve the LORD,
whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.**
- ³¹They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying to them, "The LORD has acted!"

Second Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

We love God and others because God first loved us. We cannot say we love God, whom we have not seen, while hating fellow Christians, whom we regularly see. Love toward God is to be matched by love toward others because the essence of God is love.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: John 15:1-8

On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart from him, they can do nothing.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

In our gospel reading today, Jesus talks about being the vine and God the Father being the gardener. At first, I had a hard time grasping the imagery. I do not know about you, but I understand things better if I can see what is being described. Either in a physical form or mentally.

Then I thought about my paternal grandmother. Beside growing a half-acre to one acre vegetable garden year in and year out, she loved ornamental flowers. My grandmother would buy a bush or flowers from a nursery, plant it in her yard, and tenderly care for it. There were azaleas, camellias, boxwoods, and all sorts of plants that I have no idea what they were.

It was amazing to watch her tend to all these flowers. I have no idea how many pounds of fertilizer and peat moss she had me put out. By the time I became her helper, she was in her 70s and 80s and deeply loved her bushes and plants. She tenderly trimmed them, fed them, and watered them as needed until she died.

Thinking of my grandmother made me think of ornamental vines. One example would be the rambling rose or an American climbing rose. Instead of a bush that is a stand-alone like azaleas, the rambling rose is vine-like and climbs. It not only climbs, but it needs to be trained or directed in its growth up and out. There is also the trimming of limbs that go the wrong way or have died. It takes a gardener with patience and a lot of love to grow one. Roses require a lot of work at times, yet most folks who do roses do not mind at all. My grandmother's love and care for gardening is an extremely small image of God's love for the world. God provides a method for us to be connected to God and each other.

Throughout the Old Testament, an image of a vine is used in reference to Israel. "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit." (Hosea 10:1) and Isaiah speaks of Israel as a grape vine that is expected to yield good grapes but does not. Israel was seen as God's vine or vineyard that needed care. yet God loved Israel enough to care for the vineyard. To tend to it. To help it grow better.

Supposedly, Israel even put a grape vine on a portion of the temple walls as a reminder of God's love. But it also served as a reminder of Israel's need for guidance and nurturing from God. That Israel had gone astray at times, yet God welcomed Israel back.

In John, Jesus is the vine that God nourishes and feeds. If you notice over the course of Jesus' ministry, Jesus steps back from the crowds and spend time with God the Father to restore himself while on earth. Yet Christ also interacted with the people. Bringing God to them in the flesh. Jesus, as the vine, connects us with God the Father. Through Christ's death and resurrection, the vine extends throughout the whole world and all time, even to here and now. Through faith in God, we are connected with God and each other.

Granted, it is hard to see that connection of God's love at times. Sometimes we cannot see others, the ones we love, due to a pandemic, or the loved ones who live in another town or state. We cannot even see Jesus in the flesh like Thomas and the other apostles did.

Yet we can still see God's love through the "fruits" of those around us. There is the vaccine that allows us to go out again safely. There is the phone call from a friend or loved one.

God's love is visible through the conversations that each of us have had in parking lots for the last few months. God's love, and ours, can be seen and felt by those being fed by food pantries and backpack buddies.

We know all of this is from God and is God's activity. How? Because these are the actions of love, and God is love. God is love and the source of all love here on earth. God has and will love all of creation, to nurture us, help us grow, and trim away what is not needed. Just like a gardener would.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be here for us always to tend to us. To love us. Like Israel, sometimes we fall away and need a reminder that we need God. God's love allows us to choose to fall away or walk away from God. BUT God's love always calls us back. Not forcing us but calling us, inviting us back. Waiting with open arms. God's love and concern for us is always there.

God the Father as the gardener and Jesus as the vine makes a little more sense now, I hope. God the Father is always faithful, Jesus connects all of us to God and each other while the Holy Spirit keeps providing a direction to learn and grow into love and faith, just like a gardener guides a rambling rose.

God is love. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 452

Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

God of all fruitfulness, you abide in your church and your church abides in you. Cleanse us by your word and give yourself to the whole church on earth so that it bears fruit and witnesses to your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have created the heavens and the earth. As we wonder at the beauty of creation, may we seek vital connections among all that depends on the earth for life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You rule the nations with justice and love. Give the leaders of the earth assurance of your abiding presence, that they lead not by fear but with love for those they are called to serve. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have loved us so that we can love others. We pray for all in need of your love: those who are poor, lowly, outcast, weak, or fearful. Provide for the needs of all especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You gather us with all the saints by the power of your Spirit. With them, may our hearts live forever in your keeping. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 650 / LBW # 359 *In Christ There Is No East or West*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.