

Daily Discipleship

Fifth Sunday of Easter (B) – John 15:1-8

The Path of Discipleship: *Connected to Christ*

Focus Question: *How do I remain connected to Christ and others?*

word of life

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5 (NRSV)

Read John 15:1-8

The context of this passage from the Gospel of John is significant. This imagery of Jesus as the true vine is a part of his final discourse to his disciples at the Passover meal. Through bread, wine and ritual, the people of God tell the sacred story of God’s faithfulness and saving action once again. The setting is rich in symbolism; each action and word carries meaning.

Jesus speaks of a familiar agricultural imagery of vine and branches to describe the disciples’ relationship to him. On this night of remembering, Jesus’ imagery calls to mind the Old Testament imagery of God as a vinedresser. (Isaiah 5:1-7) A rich and fertile vineyard is planted with choice vines; yet in spite of the vinedresser’s care, the vines yield wild grapes.

As Jesus speaks to the disciples, he clearly identifies the participants in the imagery. Jesus is the vine. God is the vinegrower. The disciples are the branches. Life for the branches is dependent upon remaining connected (“abiding” vs. 4) to the vine. Apart from the vine and its sustaining root and stem, the branches can do nothing. Jesus is the source of all nourishment and strength, the life-blood needed for the branches to exist and thrive.

1. *What does it mean to “abide” in Christ?*
2. *How do we stay connected to God?*

Note the two actions of the gardener or vinegrower. The first, which would happen in Israel in February or March, is to cut off the branches that bear no fruit. (John 15:2) For the Gospel writer of John, it is inconceivable for a disciple connected to Christ to not bear fruit. Love and keeping the commandments (John 15:9-10) are natural by-products of discipleship. As Martin Luther once said, “An apple tree bears apples!” Bearing fruit is a natural result of remaining connected to the vine. Life in Christ is a committed, fruitful life.

3. *What kind of fruit is expected from a disciple of Jesus?*
4. *Why is abiding in Christ necessary in order to bear fruit?*

The second action of the vinedresser is to prune the fruit-bearing branches so that they might be stronger and bear more fruit. This action at first glance appears harsh. Yet what branch doesn’t have some wild shoots and dead limbs which need trimming? A branch properly pruned will be stronger to withstand the heat of the day and the storms that may come.

5. *What is your reaction to the imagery of God pruning the branches? Is it comforting, or disturbing, or both?*

Jesus is clear. Life – the true, fruitful, abundant life – is known only as we remain connected and abide in him.

word *among us*

The early summer in Texas was a time to harvest the wild mustang grapes that grew in the brushy pastures of the family farm. The mustang vines grew in live oak and mesquite trees and on fence posts and wires. Their leaves provided a canopy shelter from the hot Texas sun. Their thick, tough woody stems were strong enough for playful children to swing like Tarzan and Jane from them.

Occasionally, when picking a cluster of grapes, the fruit would cling so tightly to the vine that a branch would break off with the fruit. After ten minutes in the Texas summer heat, the broken-off branch would be limp and lifeless, nothing more than dead wood to be swept away. But connected to the vine, the branches grew and blossomed and produced plump, tart grapes.

1. *Close your eyes and imagine a scene with vines. Describe it.*
2. *What has been your experience with vines?*

Vines can teach a great deal about faith and the Christian life; they illustrate the importance of being connected to Christ and to one another. Vines can also demonstrate the withering, life-sapping pain of being separated from God and from others – how we shrivel up and die without that connection.

3. *What part of this illustration has meaning for you?*

Vines continue to teach the importance of taking time to remain. Too often, in our busy lives, we find ourselves urged to do, to go, to produce, to bear fruit. This urgency is felt in our personal, professional, and even in spiritual life.

4. *What might it mean for you this week to pause and remain in Christ?*

The imagery of Jesus as the vine emphasizes the importance of remaining and abiding in Christ. In prayer and worship, in the study of Scripture, in holy conversation and connection with other branches – it is there where strength is found to endure the heat of the day and the storms of the seasons.

Remain in Christ ... remember your baptism.

Remain in Christ ... remember you have been grafted to the vine through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Remain in Christ ... plant your roots deep in God's love. Tap into the living water.

Remain in Christ ... and the fruit will come.

The fruit will come ... not because of what you do, but because of the life-source flowing in and through you.

5. *Take a moment to connect with others around you. Seek ways to thank God and each other for being connected to the vine of Christ.*

Prayer

Gracious God, source of all life, keep me connected to you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 5:1-7

last word

Take time this week
to abide in Christ in prayer.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2006 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

5 Easter (B) Page 2 of 2