



How Much the Vinedresser loves His Vines

For me, the parable of the True Vine is one of those parables that can be disturbing and seem to be quite unjust. The pruning left me feeling very vulnerable, judged and unappreciated. It was always difficult to present it to children when it

left me fearing God more than feeling like a child of God.

This changed for me one day during a heavy snowfall right in my own backyard. I looked out my kitchen window one wintery day in mid-January and saw my elderly Italian neighbour, Valentino Antoneilli, who we called Moro, standing in the middle of his yard turning only to gaze at his vines. He stood there for so long that I was worried that there was something wrong so I opened my back door and called out to him, "Moro what are you doing?" He replied, "I am looking at my vines."

Well, his entire backyard was covered with snow and grapes vines. He had vines growing on trellises and fences all around his yard. In fact, he liked to do this so much that he had also planted three vines in my yard that made a large sheltering canopy for our patio. He said nothing else so I put on my coat to go out and find out just what could be so interesting about these brown barren branches in January.

Naively, I started the conversation by saying. "I guess you are making a plan about what to do with them in the spring." He said, "Yes. I am deciding which ones will be pruned back." I gulped and said, "Well, I guess you will prune back the ones that did not make any fruit last summer. He replied, "Oh, I will trim them back a little, but the ones that I will severely cut back are the ones that produced the most fruit." I felt like a knife had been stabbed into my stomach. Moro continued, "The vines that produced the most fruit will be cut back the most." It was as if he knew each vine in some kind of intimate way and he remembered what they had produced.

I became very aware that I was not just speaking to my neighbour but that I was getting a new insight into how God works with us. Moro saw that I was disturbed with his answer and added that every time a vine is cut back, it will rest for a while. Then, when new growth happens, there will always be two new branches where the one branch was cut. In time, he will have to decide which of these two branches will remain and which one will be cut.

He said, "Italians have an expression: 'Keep it poor it will make you rich.' That means that the branches must remain close to the vine. The fruit will be sweet and abundant. If I let the branches grow, they will be weak and if they produce any fruit, it will be small and sour. The wind will break the weak branches and all is lost. If I tie the branches and keep them close to the vine there will be a great harvest!" He continued, 'Susan, I do not do this because I want the fruit. If I wanted fruit I would go to the store and buy it. I do this because I love the vine and the branches. "

Moro had no idea how much he had helped me. He continued to work in his vineyard for a few more years. Every day he tended to the vines and mine too! Every year he did his pruning and harvesting. He is now blind and has had one leg amputated. He asks his wife about the vines and all the branches as if they were part of his family. He gives clear instructions about how to treat each branch. He has it all in his mind and in his heart. Moro has not lived at home for 7 years. He has been hospitalized and does his work from a distance.

Now I see this parable in a new light. I imagine God studying me, watching me, and yes, pruning me. I feel chosen, protected and loved. Pruning still hurts, but now I am learning to enjoy the resting time before new growth. This not only helps me feel like a child of God, but also makes me feel most grateful for a God who loves me so much. I feel safe in his plan, in his heart, and in his hands.

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