

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

5th Sunday of Easter | For Sunday, May 2, 2021

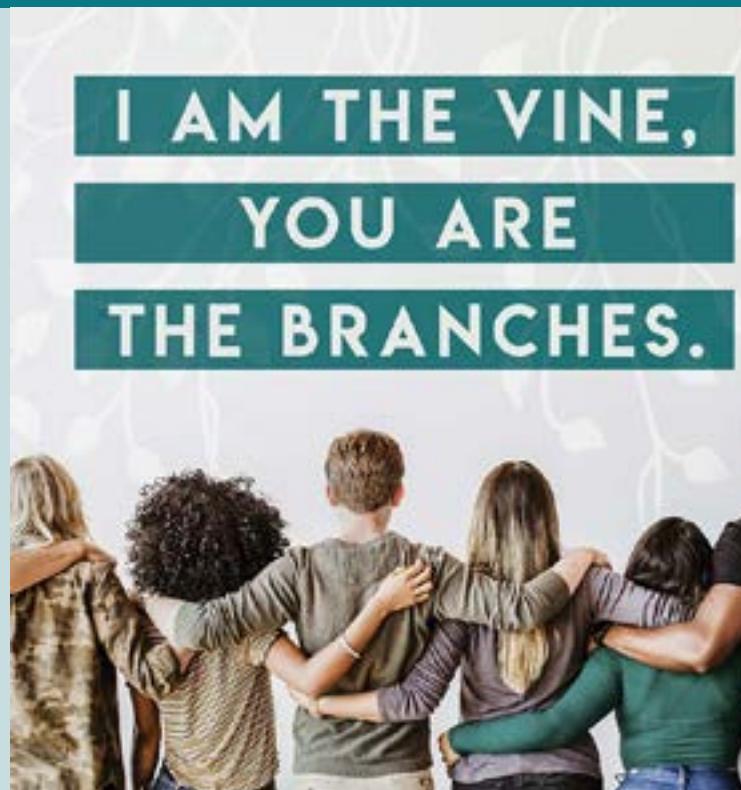
Staying Connected To One Another In Christ

Written by Douglas Sousa

Acts 9:26-31

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8



After college, I entered a program in Rome that required me to be away from the country for two years with no possibility of returning home. These were the days before the internet, Zoom, and Facebook, when even phone calls were expensive. As the time for me to leave drew near, I was feeling sad at the possibility of losing touch with so many people I had come to love. When I shared this with my pastor, he told me, "The Jesus you will be praying to in Rome is the same Jesus your friends will be praying to here at home." Those simple words reminded me that, even half a world away, I would remain connected with my friends through the mystery of faith and prayer.

At the Last Supper, Jesus faced the prospect of leaving his disciples. He wanted them to know that although he would no longer be with them physically, his presence would nonetheless still be very real and active among them. And so, Jesus used the image of the vine to describe the ongoing connection he would have with his followers even after his death and resurrection. Just as the branch is vitally connected to the vine, so the believer is vitally connected to Jesus. And just as, apart from the vine, the branch shrivels up and dies, so those who are not connected to Jesus have no life within them.

The Last Supper is the only place where Jesus uses the image of the vine, but it repeats a theme which echoes throughout the gospel of John — that Jesus "stays" or "remains in" his

disciples and that they "stay" or "remain in" him. For example, when Jesus asks the first disciples what they want, they do not ask him, "Where are you going?" but, "Where are you staying?" This "remaining" points to the mystery of Jesus' ongoing presence within his disciples.

The fact that we each sprout individually from the vine which is Christ does not mean that we are separated from one another. Jesus connects us not only to himself but to one another. Together we form the one vine which extends its branches throughout the world and bears fruit in love. The woman who folds her hands to pray in Tennessee draws life from the same source as the man who kneels down in Bangladesh. The teenager who visits the sick in Buenos Aires does so with the same love that moves a rich woman to give her coat to a homeless person in Lisbon. It is the same Jesus who continues to be present and active throughout the world just as he promised his disciples.

At the Eucharist, we gather to witness the transformation of "the fruit of the vine and work of human hands" into the very life blood of Christ. It is the source of our life and its highest expression. We offer with the gifts of bread and wine all that we are and all that we have done. It does not always seem like much. But we offer it precisely so that it can be transformed into something beyond our power to achieve. Pondering the mystery of the life of Jesus within us will make us grow in our longing to be united with him through Holy Communion. And it strengthens our sense of unity with other Christian believers throughout the world.

In Christ we remain connected to one another through him.

Douglas Sousa

PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
You are the vine and we are the branches
Because of you we are alive.
Because of you, we bear fruit.
As we reach out to you
Keep us mindful of the needy
Who yearn to be reached out to.
As we stretch out our hands to you,
Let us also stretch out our hands to the hungry
So that the fruit we bear in you
May nourish others.
Amen