

IK Sermon and Prayers
Pastor Nancy Nyland,
Director for Evangelical Mission
May 2, 2021
Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 15th chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord

John 15:1-8

(Jesus said) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Jesus gives us this imagery of vines and branches and bearing fruit or not.

At first read, we may hear some of these words of Jesus as threats:

- Removing branches that don't bear fruit.
- Pruning branches to bear more fruit.
- Throwing away branches and left to wither
- Then gathered and thrown into the fire and burned

But I wonder if Jesus is not so much using these statements as threats, but just stating the facts of life. Life is tough. Life is unpredictable. There are temptations that threaten to pull us away from Jesus. There are circumstances beyond our control. There are consequences for poor choices that we make. There are sorrows and hurts and disappointments. All this, and more, is a part of life.

Just as the branches of a vine experience extreme heat, strong wind, torrential rains damaging hail, or bitter cold. So too, life, just living life, can bring us challenges and burdens, difficult decisions and unfair treatment, loneliness, sorrow, and excruciating pain.

Think of the families who struggle because the bread winners have become unemployed. Think of the caregivers who day by day, little by little are losing their spouse or parent to dementia or Alzheimer's. Think of the single moms or dads who are raising their children in the midst of extreme loneliness or sorrow. Think of the kids who are being cyber-bullied and begin to believe the poor self-image being communicated to them over and over again. Think of the people of color who fear for their life every time they walk out the door or get in their car or shop at a store. Think of the parents who receive a call during the night that their child has been killed in a car accident or shooting. Think of those who have lost loved ones to Covid who have not been able to say, "good-bye." This list can go on and on. Life is not easy, life deals some wicked blows.

Jesus says, "Abide in me, as I abide in you." Jesus invites us, encourages us, tells us, maybe even commands us to abide in him. "Stay close to me," Jesus says. "Find your home in me." "Stay connected." "Receive your sustenance from me."

The vine through its deep roots provides for the branches, provides nutrients and nourishment and water. Jesus invites us to abide in Him, receive nourishment for your body and souls — this is my body broken for you, this is my blood poured out for you. Receive springs of living water pouring out upon you, stirring within you....the life-giving Spirit.

Jesus says, "Abide in me, as I abide in you." See my abiding presence, my unconditional love and forgiveness. See the way I welcome sinners and those rejected or outcast by society. See the way I bring wholeness and healing. See the way I love my Father and my Father loves me. See the way I accept and love all people. Abide in me, as I abide in you, abide in everyone, abide in the world.

Indeed, Jesus invites us to abide in him, but Jesus says, "Abide in me" and then he says "as I abide in you."

Jesus says, "Abide in me, as I abide in you." Jesus doesn't say, "IF you abide in me, then I will abide in you." There is no cause and effect, no if....then, here. Jesus abides in us, in you, in me, no matter what.

Jesus abides in you. God's Spirit....Jesus' Spirit dwells within you. There is nowhere that you can hide, nowhere that you can flee from the presence of God....Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

- When you are struggling to make ends meet, wondering how you will survive financially....Jesus abides with you, walking the difficult path, giving you strength and encouragement.

- When you are overcome by the grief of losing someone you love, wondering how you will put one foot in front of the other.....God is there to hold you, comfort you, heal you, bring you peace.
- When you are facing a difficult decision, when other's are causing you to question your worth, when life seems overwhelming or when the pandemic seems never-ending, the Spirit is stirring within you whispering words of wisdom, assurance, love and hope.
- When fear grips you, anxiety controls you, or panic freezes you, God's strong and mighty hand holds you tenderly, providing a place of protection and rest.

"As I abide in you." These words, these beautiful words are promise, pure promise. These are gracious words of presence and assurance. Words of faithfulness, of connectedness, of being held in the grip of God's grace.

Jesus says, "Abide in me....as I abide in you." 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.

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 see 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 (esp...). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

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.

Hear us now as we pray the words that Jesus has taught us,
**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.**

Blessing

May our glorious God grant you a spirit of wisdom to know and to love the risen Lord Jesus.
The God of life, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!
Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!
Thanks be to God. Alleluia!