

May 10, 2009

“The True Vine”

5<sup>th</sup> of Easter  
John 15:1-8

On my first summer charge as a student minister we took up residence in the manse in Compeer, Alberta. Our neighbours across the street invited us to use some of their garden to plant vegetables – which we did.

We planted a variety of things and did some caretaking.

Because the garden was a little ways away and not visible, as the Spring went on we kind of forgot about it. Going over to take a look at it after a few weeks of neglect, I was startled to see huge weeds growing everywhere. We had not been good caretakers of the garden we had planted.

My gardening confidence has never recovered from this experience.

How many people like to get their hands in the good earth?

‘Tis the season when lots of us are digging, preparing the soil, planting, pruning.

Today on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter which is also Mother’s Day and Christian Family Sunday, we hear from John’s gospel another of Jesus’ “I am statements”. Last week we reflected on Jesus saying – “I am the good shepherd”. In another place he says – “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Today we hear Jesus say – “I am the true vine”.

In the passage Jesus is the true vine; God the Father is the vine dresser, and the disciples, us, are the branches.

As branches from the true vine, we require pruning!

Occasionally we get growing in wrong directions; sometimes parts of us need to be trimmed back; it happens that parts of us die and need to be cut off.

God the vine dresser is at work as a pruner in our lives.

A trim here, a snip here, a major chunk cut off there – all of it to encourage new growth, healthy growth in us.

I give thanks that God is at work as pruner in our lives and in our life together as a community. God cares for us and wants to see our growth and development.

God cares for us – watching over us, tending us.

Last week Jesus told us “he was the good shepherd” who knows his sheep and lays down his life for his sheep.

Whether as a shepherd caring for his sheep or as a gardener tending his vineyard John wants us to hear the love and care that God has for us.

In the book “Vines and Climbers” the author observes:

“Many vines just don’t know when to quit or in which direction to grow. They must be taken in hand early on or they will be collapsing trellises, pulling down fences, and obscuring windows and doors.

To keep a vigorous climber healthy you must:

- + remove any dead, damaged, diseased or unproductive stems;
- + remove overly tangled stems;
- + remove errant stems, especially those growing away from the support;
- + direct its growth
- + limit its growth.”

For us as individuals and as a Christian community in which directions should we grow?

How do we discover the direction God is calling us to grow?

Can we trust God’s pruning activity in our lives, letting parts of us die so that new shoots may grow?

When we’re not sure which direction to grow in can we trust that God will gently prune our wayward vines so that we can grow in the life giving way God desires for us?

Can we trust the great pruner of our lives to gently trim off those things within our families and our church which are no longer life-giving; that God will remove overly tangled stems – the complex intertwining in our family and in our church community that squeezes out life instead of nurturing life; thoughts and actions that take us away from our source and from our grounding – from God.

We need God, the great pruner in our lives, to remove errant stems that are growing away from the support.

As we work in our garden this Spring and Summer let us imagine God the great gardener at work in our lives – pruning, nurturing, encouraging our growth. Let us trust that God’s power continues to work in us, shaping us in God’s image – wanting the good growth and pruning and burning that which is no longer life-giving. Let us give ourselves into God’s hands – the great pruner.

Recently the paid staff here had a time of discussion with our Ministry and Personnel Committee – a year end evaluation.

I was reading of a person who had their year end evaluation and were surprised when they were asked the question – “What in your plans for the coming year will it take an intervention from God to accomplish?”

He goes on to say: “attempting only those things that I knew I could already do well was a convenient excuse for relying upon my own strength. Perhaps God and my evaluators were prodding me to stretch outside the boundaries of certainty in ways that would require absolute dependence upon God.

What in our ministries as churches or as individuals requires us to remain vitally attached to God?”

Christ is the vine we are the branches. Our sustenance and our growth comes from Christ. In our text today Jesus says – “apart from me you can do nothing.”

We are dependent on God’s grace.

“What in our plans for the coming year will it take an intervention from God to accomplish?”

+ To accept that my Mom has Alzheimers will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

+ To recognize that my children are who they are and will become what they will become will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

+ To see how I should use my gifts in God’s service will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

+ To discern God’s call in my life will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

+ To deepen my desire to abide in God will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

+ To recognize that “apart from God I can do nothing” will take an intervention from God to accomplish.

As we work in our gardens this Spring and Summer let us wonder about “what in our plans for the coming year will it take an intervention from God to accomplish?”

In our reading today Jesus says – “Abide in me, just as I abide in you”.

The Greek word translated “abide” is “meno”.

It could also be translated as – “I have come and made my home in you, now make your home in me” or “stay put in me, as I stay put in you.”

In John’s gospel there is a deep intimacy between Jesus and his followers – a closeness, an abiding, an indwelling.

Abiding in Christ will bring us life in abundance and we will bear much fruit.

Amen. Thanks be to God.