

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 10, a.D. 2009

John 15: 1 – 8

Jesus spoke the words of the Gospel Reading in the Upper Room on the night he was betrayed to frightened disciples who were unsettled and shaken upon hearing of their Master leaving them under the most painful circumstances of the cross. His concern was still for his beloved, as he comforted them with words of preparing a place for them, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching, my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him and will send them the Holy Spirit.

We hear our Lord's words of the True Vine and his blessed branches standing on the other side of Easter and that makes it easier to see the lighter side, the joyful side, the refreshing side of things. Now is the glad time of year when you can fill your lungs with fresh air and rejoice in the rebirth of spring.

Either way, Jesus is still our source of life and the reason why we bear fruit. We have been united to him by faith as branches are joined to the vine. He gives us life as a vine does the branches. The branch receives everything from the vine.

It definitely does not work the other way around. The branch is nothing without the vine. A branch has no power within itself and cut off from the vine, it withers and dies. A vine-less branch has no support, no protection from the wind, and no water from the roots. Without Jesus we die.

What matters is where the branch is attached! If it is attached to the true vine, the sap that flows in spring from the vine to the branch, gives it life. Such a grafted branch into the true vine is never alone. It receives nutrition and then grows to bear fruit.

If Christ is supplying the food and the support, how is it possible that some branches fail to produce fruit or begin to wither and die? When pastors suffer clergy burn-out and lay volunteers have to take a break from church because they have no more energy, what is going on? Has Christ stopped feeding them? Is there a problem with the food he wants to give them?

Or is it possible that the branches begin to believe that they have to do it all on their own? That Jesus could do nothing apart from them? Without them, the church would die?

Whenever a Christian feels burned out, it's not so much that they are over-worked, but that they have begun to pull themselves off from the vine. It's never all up to me to produce fruit in the vineyard of Christ. That is a dreadful mistake. Even though living the Christian life is much work, hard work, tiring work, calling forth all our energy, the power to bring forth fruit never comes within, it always come from the vine.

And that vine is Christ. The fruit he wants is always the fruit that comes from his vineyard. That work is love. And to love as God loves, can only come from God never from ourselves.

And so Christ tells us to stay in Him. Stay in him and you will never burn out. As branches we have been grafted into the vine and so receive his life that flows into us. It is the life that God's love has brought us. The life that comes from above. It comes through hearing his words, eating his body and drinking his blood, the same blood that flowed from the dead wood of the cross, now gives life to the crushed soul so that it can love.

By this wonderful heavenly nourishment that comes from the vine, the branches bear fruit. St. Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These fruits are above all, the things that describe Jesus first and foremost. How dreadful it is when Christians burn themselves out by thinking that now that they have been brought into the kingdom, they have to start producing these fruits of the Spirit on their own.

That is the first step in tearing yourself away from Christ. Is Christ not loving towards you, joyful over you, brings you peace, is very patient with you, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled when it comes to you? When Christ is all of these things toward us, His love creates all of the same things in us, whether we are aware of it or not, it simply happens.

Every branch grafted into the vine becomes loving, joyful, peaceful, patient kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. It all comes from the words that you first heard. Christ is the true vine that unlike the vine of Israel, was completely faithful to God in every way of the covenant and was cut down on the dead tree of the cross to give us forgiveness, life and salvation.

Now keep on hearing these words of life as you abide in Christ. What you first heard and believed, keep on hearing and believing. There are many who would love to chop you off of the vine, deceiving you to think that it's old news, unnecessary, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, stay at home and spin your own version of spirituality.

This is when the gardener comes to his beloved branches and begins to prune. Cutting in order to encourage more growth. Disciplining is the father's love for those he isn't finished with yet. God is never finished with us until we see him face to face. Until then, he keeps pruning and looking for more works of love to benefit our neighbour, works that start from his love to us.

There are many people in your life that need to hear of God's love in Christ Jesus. United to the true vine, we have life to the full, and a powerful source of never-ending love.