

Worship Service for May 2nd: 5th Sunday of Easter

- **New Testament:** Acts 8:26-40
- **New Testament:** John 15:1-8
- **Psalms:** Psalm 22:25-31

Announcements:

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Birthday shoutout to Doug White. Happy 80th and wishing you many more returns.
- Bible study has been suspended for now until further notice.

Sermon Title: I Am The True Vine: Without Me You Can Do Nothing!

The statement I AM that Jesus has been using from last week has great significance. When God sent Moses to the Israelites in the book of Exodus, Moses asked God who he would say had sent him to deliver them out of Egypt. God told Moses to tell the Israelites that the I AM WHO IS I AM had sent Him (Exodus 3:14). By describing Himself this way, God was proclaiming that He is the personal, eternal, self-existing and self-sufficient Creator and sustainer of all. Moses was to tell the Israelites that he had been sent by the One true God – the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who is the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is responsible for all that exists, and He sovereignly directs all things to accomplish His purposes. Though the world is ever-changing, HE IS.

The writer of the gospel of John has used this statement throughout his book to identify Jesus. In other words, he is telling us that Jesus Christ is the I AM of the Old Testament. He is God who has come in human form to live in the world and bring salvation unto humanity. God Almighty dwelling on earth in human form. When Jesus says, "I AM," he is referring to Himself as Yahweh, the Lord God who created the heavens and the earth, the Word made flesh. John is therefore telling his audience "make no mistake, Jesus is God."

The I AM is the all-sufficient God and therefore can be different things to different people at different times depending on the situation and the need. Last week he revealed himself to us as 'the Good Shepherd' and today he is revealing himself to us as the 'true vine.'

The ancient Palestinians grew vines as a primary produce for the people and a vine could get as big as 6-8 inches in diameter and could survive for hundreds of years. Therefore, when Jesus used the illustration of a shepherd or vine, he did so because he knew without a doubt that the people will understand him.

Vines need to focus their energy on producing quality grapes and they need enough sunlight for growth. If they are left without proper care, they would produce a lot of excessive growth which would need to be cut off in order for the vine to bear good and quality fruit.

For the vine to be well taken care of, dead branches had to be cut while those that bore fruit would be pruned. The Hebrew word for 'prune' means 'clean' or 'pure.' In the context of this passage, Jesus links the 'pruning' of the vine with the 'clean' state of his disciples. They have already been pruned and will continue to be pruned so that they keep bearing more fruits. The disciples have had to submit themselves to the knife of the pruner, cutting away the other goals they had in their lives.

Within the Jewish tradition, the vine symbolized Israel who had been brought out of Egypt by God and planted in the promised land. However, this nation had been ravaged by wild animals and needed protection and re-establishment. Israel as a vineyard had produced wild grapes instead of good quality grapes.

Jesus is announcing to his disciples that he is the 'true vine' – the true Israel and his followers are God's true people. Those who serve God in spirit and in truth and who are always connected to the vine. It is on him that the purposes of God are now resting. This was an illustration of the intimate relationship that Jesus would share with those who abide in him.

How do we remain in the vine? As Christians we must remain in the community of faith – the community that knows, loves and worships the Lord. We must remain in the sheepfold because it is only there that we will be protected and taken care of. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. When a Christian takes themselves out of the Christian community, if they don't join another community of God's children, that will be a recipe for disaster. The Bible says the thief comes to kill, to steal and to destroy and Jesus came to give life in abundance. Going away from the sheepfold, we expose ourselves to the devices of the devil and we become easy

prey to his evil plans. However, when we abide in Christ, he prunes us, cleanses us and makes us pure and prepares us to bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God.

These days we are going through very trying times. Now more than ever we need to totally surrender and abide in Christ. This is not the time to take offence at the tiniest things. We need each other more than ever to stand firm, stay in tune and in touch. Even though we are on lockdown we must make sure to remain as people of prayer and worship in our own intimate, private lives. We must make sure to abide in Jesus, knowing and being known by him. If we want to know him well, we need to go back to reading our Bibles daily once again. We have to come back to our Lord and our Saviour.

Jesus promises to prune us so that we can bear much good fruit. Pruning is going to hurt but it will be worth the pain and discomfort. Pruning is an intimate process that takes place only between a shepherd and his sheep and a Saviour and his children. The Bible says God rebukes only those He loves. Therefore, if the Saviour Jesus Christ is pruning you, it is because he loves you. Stop resisting and let him do what he is expert at doing so that you will come out better, more refined and bearing much good fruit. If you feel that you have been gone for too long, remember that we serve a God who is rich in mercy. He is ready to forgive you and start a new walk with you. Come therefore and receive his mercy and pruning and transformation. May God help us through the power of the Holy Spirit to surrender to His pruning in order to bear much fruit.

Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, we draw near to you in prayer this day, trusting that your love changes lives and your resurrection brings hope into the world God loves. You have drawn near to us and walk with us through every challenge. We are so grateful for signs of hope even in the midst of the pandemic, for vaccine distribution and recovery plans, for generosity and creativity offered in so many surprising corners. As we lay before you the concerns on our hearts today, draw near to those we name and bring the gift that is needed.

Vine of life, in Your branches we are nestled taking shelter and sustenance in the shade of Your strength. With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope we have found in placing our roots in You, for in life You nourish us and Your Holy Spirit

encourages us to reach our full potential in the gifts we have been given that others may know of Your love.

Lord, make us more than sour grapes and unripe olives. In the hardships of the world may we look beyond the pandemic, bitter politics and divisions to find Your love at the core of our relationships. There may all people work with what we have in common that we might grow to be a people of respect and trust.

May our branches bow with the weight of the fruit you have bestowed. Help us to look beyond our own needs, to recognise those who are hungry for food, love and justice. May we offer others the shelter needed under the weight of Your branches, so they find a rest from the cold and darkness, the hatred and loneliness of this world. Instead, may Your Spirit enable us to value the gifts and talents of all.

May our leaves soak up Your light. When we meet those who are worn down with illness, loneliness, grief and abandonment, may the light of Your presence shine in the encounters they have with others that all might know Your compassion.

Generous God, we bless you for your gift of life renewed through Christ's love, and through springtime growth in fields and gardens. Bless the gifts we offer you. May they bring hope and renewal to others as we serve in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

Gardener of all life, as You trim and shape us for Your purpose may we place our prayers into Your hands and trust that new seeds may grow from tired and empty thoughts.

Lord Jesus, we believe that you hear our prayers and will be faithful to our requests and concerns. Help us seize the moments you give us to reach out to our neighbours and show them the love you have to share. And so we pray together the words you 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Go now, and love one another, because love is from God. Proclaim God's salvation to every generation. Remain in Jesus Christ, and like branches of a vine, draw your life from him. And may God the vine grower tend you and make you fruitful; May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life; And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love. We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ. Amen.