

## **Easter 5 B – 04 28 2024**

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for his departure. This part of the Farewell Discourses. Jesus knows he will be going home, and he wants his disciples to be prepared. This is a pastoral moment, reminding them that they will not be alone, as he says “I am the vine and you are the branches.

Vine and branches – connected to each other. They are intertwined to the point that you have to work hard to tell one from the other. Jesus and his disciples are best friends. This sounds so good until Verse 2 comes along. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

Notice Jesus says that if the disciples are bearing no fruit, the branch is totally removed. It is those who are bearing fruit that will be pruned in order to bear more fruit. The disciples have already been bearing fruit, thus Jesus wants them to continue.

This is true, in order for new buds to form there needs to be trimming or cutting off. How many flowers do you have to cut off once they have bloomed and begin to wilt, before new ones can form and grow? Just like the Easter flowers that I have at home.

Jesus actually says that any branch that does not bear fruit needs to be cut off. Wait a minute does this mean that Jesus is letting his disciples know that as they continue without him that they will be expected to continue changing? I believe so. At this time, they don't know what those changes will look like. Throughout their life with Jesus, what they have been taught and had been doing has come into question.

His disciples had questioned him as he continued to reframe their faith. Jesus was letting them know that he wouldn't be there physically ready to answer the way that he had been. At the same time, he was reassuring them that he would not be leaving them alone.

You see Jesus says, this cutting off or pruning is not what cleanses you, but it is the word that he has spoken to them that cleanses. He says I know that you are scared of this pruning or cutting off, but it is not about your salvation, rather it is about bearing fruit. When you abide in me and I in you and do the cutting or pruning, you will bear fruit, people will see me in you.

Cutting and pruning means change and I doubt the disciples were looking forward to it, but yet what had they been doing since they began to follow Jesus. Jesus had been reframing the law that they had learned. Jesus had been teaching that in order to love one another, meant that one would need to change their way of thinking and their actions.

The disciples had been doing it, but did not always find it easy. It often went against the culture and government's laws. They were often in a difficult spot and as we move into the early church, sometimes they were jailed or stoned.

There are times in our lives that we are challenged to make changes that are not easy. Jesus is letting his disciples know that without cutting or pruning or making changes that they would not remain connected to him and would not be bearing more fruit. When we are not connected to him we began to die and lose the strength that we receive from him.

This cutting or pruning is not something that we do by ourselves. Jesus doesn't say, "I'm going to sit and watch you stumble through fear while you see the change that could be made or make attempts to do it as Jesus knows that not one of us can make changes on our own. Jesus says apart from him, we can do nothing.

Unfortunately, my call here is to stir the pot and ask questions, as well as make suggestions on how to do things differently. This may make you feel uncomfortable. Although, my job is not to force you to do something.

There have been a number of events recently that people just expect to happen the way that they have always been done. If I don't know how they have been done, they may not happen the same way. The seven last words of the church are "We've never done it that way before.

Each one of us and this includes me gets used to something always happening the same way and it make us feel comfortable. We know what to expect. When someone suggests or actually does something differently we may squirm in uncomfortableness.

A friend of mine is a pastor at a church where they said they are church of the future because they have a church in the round and have chairs that they can move around. That is no longer new, thus it is not the future. They also said that they are open to change, but when the pastor moved something in the worship space, people were up in arms and said that's not what we are comfortable with, and it really had to go back the way it was.

Change is often more difficult in churches, especially when you have been attending the same church for a while. It's a place where you just want to come and

breathe a sigh of relief that you can come and worship or attend an event and you know what to expect. However it was done in prior years is what you have come to expect.

I can tell you that change is not easy as I have made many changes over the past few years. It is even harder to be the one who is called to suggest changes. I do not like to see people uncomfortable, but we learn in our training that entering into someone else's uncomfortableness is not healthy for me or them. It is important for me to acknowledge it. I find joy in seeing light bulbs go on and changes are made to bring more health or as Jesus says bear fruit.

What allows us to make changes are staying connected to Jesus. The Greek word for abide is meno which means residing or dwelling in. Jesus dwells within us and this is connection. Jesus told his disciples how many times not to be afraid. When the pot stirrer is working and questioning and making suggestions, I challenge you to go and talk to Jesus about it.

So often when we begin feeling uncomfortable, we try and handle it on our own and this is when we get disconnected from Jesus. Jesus can speak through others, but we must be careful who we talk to. If we go and talk to someone who cannot listen objectively, then Jesus has a more difficult time speaking to you.

A healthy listener is not someone who tells you what you want to hear or tells you what to do. A healthy listener will help you discover options and as a result may help you find the one that is the healthiest, not always the easiest for you. Life is not easy, and we get tired. Change takes time and energy and there is only so much that we can handle at one time.

Hear the good news today, we are not alone when we are challenged to make changes. Jesus says that he is the true vine and we are the branches. Jesus abides, dwells, resides in each one of us. When we run from change, from pruning or cutting, Jesus says that we begin to lose our connection with him as we are trying to manage life on our own.

Jesus says recognize that I abide, reside, dwell in us as well as my words, when we recognize this, God is glorified, and we will bear more fruit as we allow Jesus to do the cutting and pruning This is how others will see Jesus in us and people will know that we are Jesus' disciples.

Let us pray: Loving God thank you for sending Jesus to abide with us. Your cutting and pruning, making changes is not easy for us. Even though we see its necessity, we still want to run from it or try and ignore it. May your Holy Spirit help us to see what needs to change in our lives and life of our church in order for us to bear more fruit and that others will see that we are your disciples. In Jesus name, Amen