

SESSION 15 – Living a Connected Life – John 15:1-27 (Still part of Farewell Discourse)
Jesus the True Vine
The World's Hatred

"I have held many things in my hands, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I will possess." Martin Luther

15:1-17 contains the final I AM sayings - I am the vine vs. 1 & 5 SIRACH 24:16-17 Isaiah 5:1-7

Jesus uses a common agricultural analogy to symbolize our relationship to him - Vine & Branches

Jesus also described as God the gardener or vine grower who prunes branches of vine in order that it may bear more fruit

Kathairos – prune/cut off/clean or cleanse

Bear fruit common image of community's faithfulness in OT but here it is sharpened further to mean the acts of love the community partakes in and shows forth

This is important – THIS IMAGERY IS DIRECTED AT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY – NOT RHETORIC AGAINST NON-BELIEVERS!

The unproductive branches are followers of Jesus that are not bearing any fruit

Also notice that even the fruit bearing branches need to be pruned in order to produce more fruit

Pruning is not an act of punishment but an act of tending to healthy branches in order that they continue to be fruitful

This is important – NOTICE THAT ONLY THE VINE GROWER PRUNES - THIS IS NOT AN ACTIVITY/JOB THAT THE BRANCHES GET TO DECIDE!

Two theologically loaded words –

1. ("meno" abide) can also be translated as remain/stay/dwell/continue occurs 12 times in this chapter alone – so I think Jesus wants us to get that he is about a **permanent** relationship
a) Gregg knepp told a story about a gardener who planted a cucumber plant but after it came up it began to rot and wither away because he noticed that a grub of some sort had begun to chew away at the main stem. We are in a permanent relationship with the main stem (Jesus) even though the ground was cultivated without the main stem giving the life-giving juices to the branches of the plant it withered and was not producing

2. Love "agape" vs. 9-11, 12-13 – Sacrificial Love

Notice that Jesus states unequivocally that he chose us – we did not choose him – Our life in God is not based on some sort of “decision” that we made for Jesus to be our personal Lord and Savior but our place on the vine is nothing more than an act of divine grace and action. (Of course, here we run into the predestination argument that Luther had to contend with)

For Personal Spiritual Growth

(From Gregg Knepp)

To remain connected to the vine is to tend to our relationship with the sacred I AM. Spiritual practices and sacred rituals feed and strengthen this relationship. The main barrier to our relationship with God is our lack of awareness or attentiveness to God’s presence in our lives. When we continually re-live the past, or are anxious about the future, we fail to live in the moment and be attentive to God’s presence now.

Spiritual practices center us in the present moment and allow us to focus on our relationship with God in the moment. Marcus Borg writes, “the spiritual journey, in the Christian as well as the non-Christian forms, is thus about the hatching of the heart, the opening of the self to the reality of the Spirit. This opening begins the process by which the self at its deepest level is reoriented and transformed.” The God We Never Knew pp. 114-115.

In this writing of Borg’s, he enumerates a variety of collective—as well as personal—spiritual practices that propel our Journey.

Collectively – the hearing of sacred stories and re-enactment of sacred rituals shape the understanding of our on-going relationship with God.

Borg also identifies the role of the senses through sacred sounds (music) speech, silence, images etc. as a means to open the presence of God in our lives. *ibid* pp. 118-119

Borg also identifies seasons – liturgical calendar – sacred time – space – worship – pilgrimage – sacred laws – All help the community promote the awareness of the Divine.

Individually – Prayer (verbal and non-verbal) – deeds/acts of love/compassion towards others. *ibid* pp. 122-127

In Celebration of Discipline the Franciscan Monk Richard Foster also adds Fasting – Confession – Study of spiritual writings – Simplicity – Solitude and Submission - As ways to bring awareness of the Sacred/Divine.

What spiritual practices have you used in the past?

Which spiritual practices have been most helpful to you in experiencing recognizing God’s presence in your life? Least helpful?

What areas of your life are currently getting in the way of your relationship with God and could benefit from being pruned so that you can bear more fruit?

How can pruning be understood as an act of grace rather than an act of judgment?

How can the image of the vine and branches contribute to our understanding of the role and function of the church?

*What collective spiritual practices does the congregation currently offer for its members?
What practices do you find most helpful?*

Are/were there new rituals and practices that the congregation has offered as a means of expanding its encounter with God? What were/are they?

HERE IS AN EXERCISE IN CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY SOMETIME – From Father Richard Rohr - Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer (p. 126)

Sit quietly and comfortably. There are no words to say, only the presence of God to experience. It is pure mystery, beyond human understanding. Whatever thoughts come to mind, simply allow them to float out of your consciousness. Simply know that “It is good and you are loved.”

If you wish to use a mantra try this one – Be still and know that I am God

Remain quiet and allow yourself to feel the presence of God.

With each breath you inhale and exhale God’s Holy Spirit. Breathe slowly and deeply, allowing God’s Spirit to fill you, and then releasing God’s Spirit into the world.

Experience the God’s Spirit within you and around you. Allow God’s Spirit to embrace you, comfort you, and love you.