

**Loving Connections**  
**John 15: 1-17**  
**October 8, 2017 – 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

Jesus said, “I am the vine, and you are the branches.” It was a month ago now that I spoke about the I AM sayings of Jesus within the Gospel of John. We recognized that, in first century Jewish circles, merely using the words “I AM” was a declaration of divinity. But there’s more than that, because every I AM saying ties a wonderful metaphor to that divine claim. So here, Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. Our heavenly father has planted the vine. Or, as I like to put it. . . When humanity turned its back on God, when humanity fell out of relationship with God, God said, “Okay, if you won’t come to me, I’ll come to you”; and the Word of God became flesh and blood to live among us, to live our life, to walk with us, to teach us, to heal us, to die our death, only to rise again to a newness of life, with the promise to be with us always. That’s the relationship that our heavenly Father has established with us, by planting the true vine in our midst.

So Jesus is the true vine, and each of us as Christians, each of us by virtue of our Christian baptism, is a branch of that vine. Each of us is connected to the vine, drawing our nourishment from the vine. It is the vine that gives the branches life, as we bask in the light of the sun.

Jesus goes on to say, “Those who abide in me bear much fruit”; and that’s our Christian call – to bear fruit. This metaphor may have been more meaningful in the first century than it is today. The grape harvest of the first century was key to survival, for wine was the primary drink of the day. At a time when water was not safe to drink, wine provided a safe alternative. Indeed, a plentiful grape harvest was a real gift. But let us not forget that this is a metaphor. And the fruit, about which Jesus is speaking is Christian love. Jesus makes that clear as he follows the metaphor of the vine and the branches with: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. . . I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Christian love – it’s a love that comes from connectedness, connectedness to the vine, Jesus Christ, and connectedness through the vine to every other branch.

We are current in the midst of our sermon series on our Guiding Principles as listed in your bulletin insert. And today’s Guiding Principle is:

**We foster lasting personal relationships, which are especially important in a digital world.** -- NOUMC is a place where all members have the opportunity to nurture and be nurtured by others in the congregation in a way that forms familial relationships that last a lifetime. The true value of

church is most apparent when people experience Christ through the care of others as they face difficult times. In those times we grow to love others in a way that lets us overlook our flaws and see God through them.

As the saying goes, “Who can you call, if you need help at 3:00 in the morning?” I would hope that answer to that is every member of this congregation. I remember once calling my sister at 2:00 a.m. I had an auto accident on my way home from college at about midnight. While, I was not seriously injured, my injuries were significant enough to warrant a trip to the Emergency Room for some x-rays and stitches; and this was in the days before cell phones. By the time I got to the hospital and found a pay phone, it was 2:00 a.m. I told my sister, “Sherry, I had an accident. I’m okay, but I’m at the hospital for some minor injuries. I’m going to need a ride home.” And of course my sister’s response was, “I’m on the way.” After the x-rays and the sutures, I walked back into the ER waiting room, to be told, “Your sister is in the chapel.” I walked into the chapel to find my sister on her knees in prayer, praying for me. Sadly, my sister died in 2010, but I’ll never forget that day.

I tell this story to remind each of us that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope that each of us will hold this church, its congregation, and every member in prayer. And I hope that every member, if they received that call at 2:00 or 3:00 am asking for help, will respond, “I’m on the way.”

I should say, that’s more than just a hope, for I know this congregation; and I know that any of you that are physically able to respond would do so. You are one of the most loving groups of people I have ever known. And to that I tell you, all of our guiding principles aren’t about change. Many already incorporate things that we are already doing and doing well; and thanks be to God for that.

I cannot begin to tell you how often someone who has just experienced a hardship – severe illness or loss, or the death of a loved one, will say to me, “What do people do that don’t have a church?” Sadly, the response is often, “They don’t find any relief for their pain. They find themselves alone. They fail to experience the amazing love of Christ.” Not that Christ doesn’t love them. Of course Christ loves them; but they fail to know, to experience that love, because they have no one to share it with them.

And let’s not forget the last statement in this week’s principle: We overlook our flaws, and see God through the people with whom we share God’s love. I have a friend who shall remain nameless. My friend has some significant issues that cause some people to find fault with him; and I regularly tell Ginny, “I love him in spite of his warts.” I pray that I can love all people in this manner, and I pray the same for every Christian. I also pray that people will love me in spite of my flaws.”

Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. . . I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

And that’s exactly what our Guiding Principle says: “The true value of the church is most apparent when people experience Christ through the care of others.” This guiding principle is easy to fulfill. We are already doing it in here; but perhaps, we need to invite more of the folks out there to come to the feast, to partake of the fruit, to experience the love, that they too may find themselves branches connected to the vine of Christ.

Thanks be to God for the great love Christ. May each of us experience and share that love every minute of every day of our lives; as we give God all the praise and all the glory.

Let us pray. . .

Most Loving God,  
Lead us and Guide us,  
that we may bear fruit that will last,  
as we share your amazing love with all whom we meet.  
Amen

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