

Sermon for Sunday, May 10, 2009

Fifth Sunday of Easter

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson **Acts 8:26-40**
Psalm **22:24-30**
Second Lesson **1 John 4:7-21**
Gospel **John 15:1-8**

In this morning's gospel lesson, Jesus talks about vines and branches—he says that he is the vine and that we are the branches. When we abide in him, we're able to bear much fruit; when we don't abide in Jesus, we are absolutely ineffective. Jesus goes on to say that if we do abide in him and bear fruit, we'll be pruned so that we can accomplish even more.

The disciples knew how necessary it was for branches and vines to be one if there were to be fruit for the harvest; they knew how that relationship symbolized the interdependence of God and Israel. They knew. Israel could do nothing without God; God, remarkably, could do nothing without Israel. The work of salvation was to be accomplished through those people who God had chosen—their identity as a people was to be intertwined with God's call to them.

Most of us gathered here this morning are a bit removed from vineyards, a bit removed from the values of pruning. We leave the vineyards to the wine conglomerates of California, France, or Germany; we leave the pruning to the electric company or the landscapers. But we know about the importance of the vine to the branches and vice versa; we know the value of trimming back trees and flowers.

But, mostly we know about love.

We know about the importance of a caress, and embrace; we know all about the value of encouraging and challenging our friends. We know about the risks of complacency, the danger of taking one another for granted.

Yes, mostly we know about love.

Jesus knows about love, too.

Jesus bears that love for all of us, in the language of human affection. This love does not detract from the sublime mystery of divine intervention, but adds to it—it reminds us that God deeply cares for us and the rest of humanity, despite our fawning ways and concrete hearts.

Jesus' love for us spreads from vine to branch, from heart to soul. It embraces us with the divine understanding of what's to come, and reminds us of our own earthly ministries along with our own importance to God.

This, then, is the message of today—we are interconnected to Jesus, our lives intertwined with the One who gives us meaning and purpose and understanding. We are connected to the One who gives us life through our own Baptismal Covenant, and we are assured that that connectedness will never be broken.

Amen. ...