

ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

2 MAY 2021

READINGS: ACTS 8:26-40//PSALM 22:26-32// 1JOHN 4:7-

21//JOHN15:1-8

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*Let us pray*

*God of wisdom and love, source of all good things, teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace and love. Lord open our ears that we may hear you Open our eyes that we may see you and open our hearts that we may accept you. AMEN*

Within the last 20 years the world has become extremely dependent on connectivity for everything it does. We stay connected through the Internet, mobile phone calls, SMS, email, Zoom conferencing and meetings, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram and Facebook. Life as we know it would be very difficult without these connections.

In today's message we will be looking at a different kind of connection - one which is so vital and important to us that living the Christian life would not only be very difficult, but impossible without it.

Let us turn to our Gospel reading and reflect on this connection

Jesus and his disciples had just concluded the meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem where they celebrated the Passover and were making their way towards the Garden of Gethsemane. (John 14:31b; 18:1). The disciples were exceedingly anxious (cf. 14:1), and perplexed as to what loomed ahead.

These men have just been informed that Jesus is going away, but that His work is going to continue, and that it is to be continue through them and their lives, **John 14:12.**

And now in John 15 Jesus is saying to them

**“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”**

**“Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit apart from me you can do nothing”**

Jesus is saying to them, if they were to carry on the work of the Lord; they needed to know how to produce that kind of fruit in their lives. He wants them to know that the only way they can be fruitful for the glory of God is not to be anxious

afraid and worried but to abide (remain) in Him, the True Vine. To be connected to him

We too are called to continue God's work in the world, our country our communities and we too are anxious, afraid, perplexed and God is saying to us too this morning Abide in me, remain in me --- be connected to me, the true vine.

***Let us now unpack and look at the symbolism of Gospel text and see how can we be and how we can stay connected to Jesus to bear much fruit***

***Firstly to be connected (abide in) to Jesus we must have a relationship with Jesus***

***In John v1 and v 5 Jesus says "I am the true vine and my Father the gardener" I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing"***

Jesus as often is using pictures and ideas which were part of the religious heritage of the Jewish nations and in this passage the vine was always part of the religious heritage of the Jewish nation. In the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vine or the vineyard of God.

*In Isaiah 5 v 1-7 we read "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel*

*In Jeremiah 2:21 we read "I planted you a choice vine of sound and reliable stock*

*In Psalm 80 v 8 we read "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it"*

*God used the Israelites to accomplish His purpose in the world, and He blessed those connected with them. He was the gardener (vine grower// vinedresser); He cared for the vine, trimmed it, and cut off branches that did not bear fruit. But God's vine degenerated and bore no fruit. The vinedresser grieved over the tragedy of Israel's fruitlessness:*

But God's vine (Israel) did not live up to its intended purpose, so God send his Son and therefore in this morning's text Jesus calls himself the ***True Vine***.

The vine is the source and sustenance of life for the branches and the branches must be attached to the vine to live and bear fruit.

The image or picture that we get here is that of a close, permanent, vital union

between the vine and branches. It is symbol of belonging, because branches belong entirely to the vine; if branches are to live and bear fruit, they must completely depend on the vine for nourishment, support, strength, and vitality.

My friends we are the branches. At our Baptism, God has connected us to Christ. We have been joined to Jesus in his death and resurrection. We are living branches, connected to the vine, Jesus Christ, by God's gracious action.

No less than 6 times in this text, Jesus uses the phrase "*remain (abide) in Me.*" No one can be a fruitful branch for the glory of God until they have a vital, life-giving connection to the Vine. Without that vital connection, the "*sap of life*" cannot flow in and through us. Before we can have anything else, from God or with God, we must have that relationship with God. Before we can have a hope of Heaven, or forgiveness of sin, we must have a relationship with Him. He wants and offers connectivity, relationship, and intimacy.

***My brothers and sisters are you connected to Jesus do you have that intimate personal relationship with Jesus because Jesus warns us in v 6 If Anyone does not remain s in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burn***

***Secondly to be connected (to abide in) Jesus means that we must allow God to prune us***

***In v 2 we read "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful***

The disciples were familiar with the role of the vinedresser (gardener). After a vine is planted, the vinedresser has two duties. First, he cuts off fruitless branches, which take away sap from the fruit-bearing branches. If sap is wasted, the plant will bear less fruit. Then he constantly trims shoots from the fruit-bearing branches so that all the sap is concentrated on fruit-bearing.

Pruning is also necessary in our spiritual lives. Through pruning the Father removes sins that limit our fruitfulness. Sometimes there are many other connections in our lives that prevent us from producing fruit and Christ wants to remove those non-productive connections and associations in our lives. Sometimes there are unhealthy connections and relationships that need to be pruned back, so that our lives are more productive of love and goodness.

But sadly sometimes we do not always want to be connected to Jesus. If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, we think my life is not my own to do with whatever I please. Jesus makes demands on me. He calls on me to be kind to people I do not really want to treat with grace and respect. He wants me to stand for justice when I would just want to keep my head down and not make waves. He expects me to recognize the worth of people that are different from me when I don't want to associate with them. He wants me to forgive people who – in my personal opinion – do not deserve to be forgiven.

*What are those unhealthy relationships and connections in your lives that need to be pruned back and changed, so that you can be more productive?*

**Thirdly to be connected (to abide) Jesus means that we will bear much fruit**

In v 8 we read “*This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit showing yourself to be my disciples*

In the case of the branch attached to the grapevine, the expected ‘fruit’ would be grapes. But in the case of a believer who abides in Jesus Christ, the sort of fruit that will be produced is Christ-like character and behaviour.

In Galatians 5:22-23 says, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*; and these qualities describe the very characteristics of our Lord Jesus Himself

Does your life show *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*?

**Fourthly to be connected (to abide in) Jesus means that we will have the strength (faith/hope) to carry on when we go through difficult and challenging time**

**Henry, a pastor in the small fishing village of Lower Brixham in Devonshire England,** had a lung condition that had deteriorated into tuberculosis Henry planned a therapeutic holiday to Italy with the hopes that the climate there would improve or at least lessen the symptoms of his poor health.

It was September 1847 and he knew he couldn't weather another cold damp British winter.. While he prepared for his trip and while he was traveling he worked on a poem, a poem that has become a hymn, one that you know, "*Abide*

***With Me.***" He posted his poem in a letter to his family while he had briefly stopped in Avignon France. He never made it all the way to Italy, Henry died there in France, and his last words were, "Peace! Joy!" "Abide With Me," was sung for the first time at his funeral.

Jesus is saying if you fear, if you are anxious, if you are experience challenges, if you are going through the valley of death, Abide in me, Remain in me, stay with me, connect with me

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

### ***Conclusion***

**My dear friends are you willing to surrender your life and connect with God and allow him to abide in you and you in him?**