



Come and See!

April 29, 2018

The Word...

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.
He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.
You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

Remain in me, as I remain in you.
Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own
unless it remains on the vine,
so neither can you unless you remain in me."

(from Jn 15:1-8)

Pondering the Word...

The vine...the branches...pruning. Jesus was great at using images the people of his time could understand. They'd all know the importance of ridding vines of dead wood and even cutting back healthy vines so they remain healthy and bear good fruit. A good vine grower was diligent in tending to his or her vineyard. I wonder what image Jesus would use today. Cleaning out our computer files so the system doesn't crash? Somehow, it's just not as poetic!

I don't know about you, but very often, I find the vineyard of my life in need of a good pruning to rid myself the dead wood that stunts my spiritual growth and stifles my ability to listen for and do God's will. The quality of the fruit I bear is directly related to the amount of time I seek God's tending—not enough and I cease to bear the fruit God has given me to share.

As a branch, I suffer, I wither, the further away I grow from the vine. And I know pruning can at times be painful. But I also know the vine depends on me to bear fruit, and without my branch, healthy and intact, the vine is not complete...something is lost.

This is an important message for us to remember as well. We are the branches, reaching out from the True Vine to bear fruit in the world. We have an important role to play in God's vineyard.

Living the Word...

Look around at your life. Is there some dead wood that needs to be removed? Things or activities you are holding onto that no longer bear fruit? Do some areas need a good cleaning out? Things that, while still bearing good fruit, are growing too far from the vine? Spring is a good time for clearing out the old and planting new habits and taking time to bloom. Nurture your new plantings with the warmth of God's love and the gentle rain of the Spirit. Oh, and if some "organic fertilizer" happens to enter the picture, don't worry—it will make what you've planted that much stronger! ☺

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Apr 30: *"We proclaim to you good news that you should turn from these idols to the living God..."* (Acts 14:5-18)
The word idols as it is used here means empty or vain things. Yes, in context, the passage is referring to altars to the Greek gods, but it poses a question for us as well: What are the empty things we place on an altar for worship and sacrifice? Our jobs, the schools our kids go to, our portfolios, the number of friends or followers we have on social media? In tomorrow's gospel, Jesus tells us that he, and only he, can give us the peace the world—and all its empty promises—cannot give. Perhaps the sacrifice we need to offer right now is to put aside all those idols and allow Jesus to bring us true peace.

May 1: *"Let (your faithful ones) discourse of the glory of your kingdom..."* (Ps 145)
When was the last time you sat down with someone and talked about God's glory? I mean really had a conversation about it, not just the rote words we say in formal prayer and worship? So often my "discourses" about God have more to do with my needs and my complaints than marveling at God's creation. The late Methodist preacher and professor, Fred Craddock, talked about growing up in rural Tennessee. Every Sunday after church services people would go "marveling." Several families from the congregation would go out and look for God's marvels right there in the little village. It was a special time. The children usually took the lead but the adults joined right in as well. It would be a marvel in and of itself if we took the time to do this! Take a few minutes today to delight in God's world. Share what you've experienced with a friend.

May 2: *"I rejoiced because they said to me, 'We will go up to the house of the LORD.' And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem...built as a city with compact unity."* (Ps 122)
The psalmist rejoices at the sight of Jerusalem, a city built on a plateau and fortified by strong walls; a city unified, a people of one mind and one heart. This might sound idyllic, but eventually, all that sameness will become dull, limiting, and exclusionary. We hear in today's first reading how the Jewish elders who joined the disciples insist the Gentiles follow Mosaic Law to the letter. They want the unity of times past. Jesus' message is not one of exclusion but inclusion. The unity Jesus seeks is based on love and peace. Our global challenge is to come to an understanding of what that really means to all peoples. Pray today for unity in love.

May 3: *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork...Through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message.* (Ps 19)
It's spring in my area of the world, although she's been a bit shy this year. But the blossoms that have already bloomed are tenacious and those awaiting their time are set and ready to go. God's heavens and earth are declaring his wisdom and artistry. Their message? "We are God's handiwork, perfect just the way we were created. And we will likely remain after the last humans walk the earth—God's cosmos is everlasting. But we'd like you and your kids to stick around for a while, so please...take better care of us. Join us in praising God by treating us gently, with respect and love. Listen for our voices resounding, carried on the winds."

May 4: *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."* (Jn 15:12-17)
Jesus gives this commandment to everyone. He loves each of us in our uniqueness which is how we are to love others. Spend time today contemplating the love Jesus has for you. Let others see that love reflected in you.

May 5: *They... had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they tried to go on into Bithynia, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.* (Acts 16:1-10)
When I read this passage, the old adage, "timing is everything" comes to mind. Paul and his companions are on the move but are "prevented by the Holy Spirit" from preaching in certain areas. Perhaps these towns are just not ready to hear the message. Paul pays attention to God's call and God's timing. God will guide us in this way too. Maybe there's someone we'd like to see come back to the fold. So we ask God to guide us: Is it our role to preach? Is he or she ready? Is now the right time? Yes, we are called by both Christ and the Church to evangelize, but seeking the Spirit's guidance is essential. God's ways are not our ways; God's timing (kairos) is not our timing (chronos). When we set out to preach the word, let's set our clocks on kairos time.