

Sermon 10 May 2015
Acts 10:44-48 John 15:9-17 "No Need to Separate"

Prayer: Gracious God, all are refreshed by you, no one misses out. We live in the great bounty of your love and acceptance, and with all creation, we rejoice. Amen.

Today's Gospel continues the teaching-story from last week. So a quick refresher is that last week we had Jesus give the picture of us (his disciples) being branches on him- the Vine. How we are alive in him and cut off from him we die; how with him and His Spirit flowing through us we change; how we **prioritise**, plan, dream and live in our 'today' and our tomorrow; **how as** his disciples we are challenged to produce fruit; **how we** are revealed as his disciples because of the productivity of our lives.... cv

So in one sense *last week* the **focus** was on us / the individual and the essential need for us **to remain** in Jesus, keeping our relationship alive and healthy, nurturing and enjoying it. This week starts where that left off – including all that 'stuff' and and adding to it. It does this by turning the focus from the individual's need to remain in Jesus, like a branch on a vine to remaining in his love.

Remember we are following John's gospel – and the one thing John **never** gets tired of telling us is that Jesus **is driven**, powered, sustained, **by love**. It is not weak – anyone who has had to prune their garden knows the pain of love! Today is Mother's day – anyone involved in mothering knows the pain of saying 'no'; anyone who has had to make tough loving-pastoral decisions like enabling a beloved pet to die... knows love has some very tough components. And of course Jesus teaching about us as *branches* and God as the gardener who prunes off the unproductive or dead bits makes us uncomfortable!

With this strong – practical love, our words from Jesus today begin with him saying 'remain in my love' and they finish with him saying "This is my command: Love one another". This passage might be summarised as: Remain in me (15:1-8) and remain in love (9-17). Opening this passage more, is to see that ^{*1} Verses 7-10 parallel verses 12-17, meaning that the themes of one are echoed in the other. **In between**, we see the themes of "asking," "fruit", "becoming disciples," "the Father loved me," and "I have loved you," in verses 7-10. These are paired with "I have called you friends (beloved)," "I have revealed everything I heard from the Father," "I chose you," "producing fruit," and the Father giving whatever we ask in verses 12-17. The themes of 7-10 are recapitulated in reverse order in 12-17. Cv

What is special about this pattern is that right in the middle ^{*2} (verse 11) is the reason **why**. "I have said this to you that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." The **richness** of this passage has to do with the joy of life in the Lord and in his mission of love. This is not to say that our spiritual life may sometimes be difficult *whether* it is that we have to deal with the 'No's of faith' or our chapter today *and* it's talk about pruning the dead leaves from the vine. The things in us that do not support the mission of God will die and be taken away. God is not a sentimentalist. BUT...

But we are not to forget that this passage is not meant to discourage and depress, it's about 'Joy' remember? It's about encouraging us to remain in Jesus – connected, belonging – one and certainly not separated off, distinct, alone and abandoned. Being connected is to have life and to be able to offer life, life that is abundant and productive. It is easy to separate the difficulties of living a life of faith and then **dismiss** or diminish or ignore the joy of life in the Lord and there's no need to do so.

Jesus encourages us to remain in him, keeping his commandments, which if you noticed despite the plural 's' – there is only one command: "that you love each other just as I have loved you." **And this**, in a nutshell, summarizes the main themes of John's gospel: the mutual indwelling of Jesus' followers with each other, and with their Lord, whose lives are about producing fruit on behalf of the Lord **and** for the love of the Lord.

No matter just how much we hear and believe it; loving like Jesus did is one of the hardest truths we are called to embrace.^{*3} Our life experiences have taught us that our world is much easier to live in / with when we clearly distinguish between friend and enemy, between “us” and “them”. National boundaries and patriotism become important lubricants for this divided world. Our personal agendas and interest groups are *easier to maintain*, and the world is *much simpler* when we only have to love those who love us, who are like us and who are part of our group. Cv

When / while we maintain our separateness we can make economic, military and even environmental decisions easily, because we only have to worry about ourselves and “our world”. Unfortunately, we inevitably discover the fallacy in our thinking **when we see** the connectedness of everything, and we begin to see that **our** actions have consequences for others, *even as theirs do for us*. Our divisions are, ultimately, *illusions*, and so the Gospel call to **love all people** is really the most common of sense. cv

It is once we begin to love sacrificially, we realise how our decisions and actions and agendas impact others, and **when** we start seeking to live in love, the world becomes a more peaceful, loving, and co-operative place – *which ultimately benefits us*. If there is anything that gives a clear picture of resurrection life, **its love** – and as we learn to love sacrificially, as Jesus did, **we bring life** to others and we enjoy a more vibrant, abundant life ourselves. *The challenge*, of course, is that the pressure is on us, as Christ followers, to be the first to embrace Jesus’ way of love, no matter the cost, in order to prophetically reveal the power of love to the rest of creation. Cv

When we love we reveal – we show – we become a picture for the world to see of Jesus and his love; his love which brings thing together, which heals division, which connects everything for life. De Laar claims **our divisions are an illusion** – therefore the real thing is to be connected; to be ‘one’ in Christ-love because that is the source of our power, and productivity. cV

I have two examples today for our reflections about ‘divisions being overcome’ **by love**. They are quite different, one is ancient the other a modern challenge. The ancient one is hidden in the few passages we had from Acts. What we heard was the absolute amazement of the believers who were in ‘Peter’s party’ travelling around with the message of Jesus for the early Christian ‘gatherings’ / churches. They were completely amazed that when they were ministering to Cornelius and family – Romans – Gentiles – **outsiders**, kept completely separated from true ‘Israelites’; when Peter prayed – the Holy Spirit of God was poured out on them in baptism!!! They were connected, they were joined, they were accepted and **one in the Lord** – branches without distinction in Jesus, the true vine.

We know in the early Church this ‘event’ took some explaining and long discussions and Paul absolutely implemented it – with difficulty etc... Change is hard, difficult, a time often of tension... but they did it. Because they did it – we belong without qualification in Jesus ‘vine’, we are loved; we have a place at the table of Jesus friends. **We are disciples** and called to **remain** that we may obey the command to love and because of our joy in belonging we reveal Jesus to the world. They see him in us – right? CcV

My second illustration is a not so gentle reminder that today is the day we remember those who have mothered us, Mother’s day. Sometimes – just sometimes we separate **who** can represent God and **who can’t**; **who can** reveal God and *who can’t*; **who can** be a portrait of God and *who can’t* and there is no need – because we all are made in God’s image to show him to the world.

Show Video.....

Our world needs to see God and the challenge is ours. Our world needs life, love, being in **God**. Can we live and **remain in** ‘the Vine- Jesus’ **with joy** and let the world see there is no need to be separate? Amen

Portraits of God

Our World needs to see God desperately
Whether they know it or not
Our world needs to see God
They need to see his protection
And his love
And his comforting hand
Our world needs to see God.

Hosea 13:8 “I will protect them like bear robbed of her cubs”
Luke 13:34 “Jerusalem, O Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”
Isaiah 66:13 “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”
Our world needs to see God.

And what if Moms are giving the world a glimpse?
What if the world can see God uniquely through Moms?
What if there's nothing ordinary about being a mom?
It's easy for mom's to miss the real effect they have in the world.
When they protect, they are displaying a God who protects.
When they comfort, moms display a God who comforts.
As they love and listen and support and carry and hold and counsel and play and work feed and dance and teach and as they do these things, moms do so much more than they realise.
They're showing the world a portrait of God.