

Jesus was talking with his disciples here in our text this morning. They were gathered together, eating the evening meal-- that final meal they all shared with Christ. He was telling them things he wanted them to know, giving them final instructions. He was not going to be with them much longer. In just a few hours, he would be arrested and crucified.

He spoke of himself as being *the true vine*. Odd as that may sound to us, it came as a familiar reference to the disciples. Preserved in their Scriptures, our Old Testament, was the Prophet Isaiah's chilling description of God abandoning Israel to the consequences of their deliberate disregard and abandonment of their relationship with the Almighty.

In a beautiful piece of prose, Isaiah described the house of Israel as God's *vineyard*. God was the vine grower--the keeper of the vineyard, the one who nourished and protected and took care of the vines so that they might bear fruit. [Isa.5:1-7] The *house of Israel*, God's own chosen nation, failed miserably to *bear fruit!* But it never lost hope that one day, God would restore its lost status among all the nations, and it would become the almighty Kingdom of God on earth!

I am the true vine, Jesus told those disciples. He declared himself to be what Israel had failed to become--God's vineyard bearing good fruit on this earth! As the *true vine* Christ was the heart, the core of all a vineyard could produce. It is that vine, rooted in the earth, that draws water and nourishment from the soil

to grow and feed the branches that flower and leaf out and produce the clusters of grapes.

Jesus spoke about God tending the vine. There was a relationship between the care given the vine and the vine's ability to produce fruit. A good harvest was dependent upon pruning away dead and useless branches from the vine to allow strong, viable branches to flourish. It was another lesson about the direct link that existed between Jesus and God.

Jesus then extended that link to include the disciples. Just as Christ and God were bonded to each other, so Christ urged the disciples to be in a lively relationship with him. *Abide in me*, he said to them. He went on to describe a very tight, close keeping of their lives together, just as close a tie with him as he had with God.

I am the vine, you are the branches he told them. The branches that bear the fruit--grow those lush clusters of sweet grapes--can do so only because they are *attached to the vine*. Only as Christ continued to *anchor and nourish* the spiritual lives of his disciples would they be able to *bear fruit* in this world. Without that connection with him they would accomplish nothing on their own. With that connection, that intentional relationship, they would have access to him and all his power to help them and be with them.

There on the eve of the cataclysmic ending of their years' long lives of companionship together, Christ emphasized their need to stay connected with him. But not just for their sakes, their benefit. Not just to help them "move on" in his absence. Jesus' disciples would press on with their lives with a purpose--his purpose that in

the end was to glorify God--to *bear fruit* that would nourish the world!

And just what “fruit” would all that relational life produce? It was much the same fruit as God hoped the house of Israel would bear. As God’s people they were to be a nation dedicated to honor God in the midst of all the nations of the world--a beacon of hope, a light set on a hill for all to see and bring God’s justice and mercy and kindness to touch the condition of all human need.

The disciples’ “fruit” was their life together with Christ, the witness that life would be to the world even after he was no longer physically with them. In that final meal, Jesus emphasized what their life together would be as his disciples. You may remember, that meal began with him washing the disciples’ feet and telling them to do the same among them. It was at that meal that he gave them the “new commandment” to love one another, just as he loved them. He then said that the whole world would know they were his disciples *if they held that selfless love for one another* in their relationship with each other.

It was no longer the witness of a *nation in the midst of the nations* that proclaimed God’s mercy and hope for humankind. With the coming of Christ, it became the witness of the *community of his disciples* that declared the love of God for the world! And that witness was to be seen in *how they cared for one another--if you love one another they will know you are mine!* And that witness was to be experienced by the world as every disciple of Christ continued to carry his works of kindness *out into life around* them.

There's a lot there in the concept of a vine and "abiding" in Christ. We celebrate our life connection with him in Communion, as we remember his life given to redeem all life, as we nourish his spiritual presence *abiding within* us, as we renew our commitment as his disciples to *give of ourselves* to the good of others--give of our "person" to another was how that came out in a conversation I had with someone about food pantry last week as I described what is involved when we are open on that 4th Wednesday--how everyone who worked that day didn't just perform a service to meet another's need, but how each one of those workers *gave themselves* to each person who came in here, in a very kind way that was filled with warmth.

Giving of ourselves to another happens as simply as that as it wells up out of a relationship with the living Christ *abiding within our hearts!* WAs we share the meaning this Table brings to our lives dear friends, let us thank God for the gift of Christ's love that is ours to know and have and becomes our own to share--to *give away to another*. And may we pray to abide in Christ, our strength and joy in all our life together, bringing honor and glory to God in all we do! Amen!

"I am the vine, you are the branches" John 15:1-8 050221 Mkh