

Worship Service

6th Sunday in Easter, Year B,

5th May, 2024

1 John 5:1-6 NRSV / John 15:9-17 NRSV

Prelude

played by church musician Annie Center

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Opening Music (video)

[No Greater Love](#)

Fred Hammond, Kim Rutherford, Noel Christopher Hall

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Welcome / Announcements

I'm glad to welcome you to worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love. As we gather today, let's share the joy and peace of Christ with each other by greeting each other as we pass the peace.

Pass the Peace

Now that you are back in your seats, please stand in body or spirit as you are able and join together in singing the opening hymn

Opening Hymn

Blessed Assurance ~ 332

Call to Worship

One: We exist because God made us.

All: **We are here because Jesus calls us.**

One: We are together because the Spirit binds us to each other.

All: **Without God, where would we be? Who would we be?**

One: Let us worship God, who makes us a community of love.

-Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, 'Hold Fast to What Is Good'. Used with permission.

Invocation

Dear God, Thank you for your great love and blessing over our lives. Your favor has no end, but it lasts for our entire lifetime. We ask for your guidance so that we might walk fully in your blessing and goodness today. We ask that your face would shine on us. That you would open the right doors for our lives, and that you would close the wrong doors and protect us from those we need to walk away from.

Establish the work of our hands and bring to fulfillment all that you have given us to do in these days. We pray that you would make our way purposeful and our footsteps firm out of your goodness and love. Give us a heart of wisdom to hear your voice, and make us strong by your favor and infinite grace. In Jesus name, Amen.

Prayer written by Debbie McDaniel at Crosswalk

Epistle Reading ~ 1 John 5:1-6 NRSV

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome,

for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

A Time of Prayer

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Vine of life, in Your branches we are nestled taking shelter and sustenance in the shade of Your strength. With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope we have found in placing our roots in You, for in life You nourish us and Your Holy Spirit encourages us to reach our full potential in the gifts we have been given that others may know of Your love.

Lord, make us more than sour grapes and unripe olives. In the hardships of the world may we look beyond the bitter politics and divisions to find Your love at the core of our relationships. There may all people work with what we have in common that we might grow to be a people of respect and trust.

May our branches bow with the weight of the fruit you have bestowed. Help us to look beyond our own needs, to recognise those who are hungry for food, love and justice. May we offer others the shelter needed under the weight of Your branches so they find a rest from the cold and darkness, the hatred and loneliness of this world. Instead may Your Spirit enable us to value the gifts and talents of all.

May our leaves soak up Your light. When we meet those who are worn down with illness, loneliness, grief and abandonment, may the light of Your presence shine in the encounters they have with others that all might know Your compassion.

Gardener of all life, as You trim and shape us for Your purpose may we place our prayers into Your hands and trust that new seeds may grow from tired and empty thoughts. Amen.

Hymn

What a Friend We Have in Jesus ~ 573

In our Gospel reading this morning, we hear the powerful metaphor of the vine bearing fruit. As we listen to these words from John, let's reflect on what fruit we bear, as individuals and as part of the greater vine.

Gospel Reading John 15:1-8 CEV

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples..

Message - *Fruitful* ~ Sermon repeat from 2nd May, 2021

by Rev. Glenn Brumbaugh

How many of you have had experience pruning a grape vine? It can be pretty precise work, can't it? When grape vines bud and grow, they send out shoots all over the place and will really take off if you let them. I used to trim my grandmother's vine when I was younger. In the fall, she would encourage me to prune the vine almost entirely back to the main branch. By that point, it was probably at least 20 years old and had a thick, gnarly trunk growing from a single root system in the middle of the arbor. When I was done, it didn't look like anything could possibly recover from a hacking like that. Yet, if I cut it way back as she taught me, it would be loaded with juicy grapes every year, which translated into many a jar of my grandmother's homemade jelly. With grapevines, the age is not as big a factor as is the proper pruning. Grapes do well when they stay close to the main vine so they can get the greatest concentration of essential nutrients to develop and ripen.

In fact, the world's longest grape vine is at Hampton Court Palace in England. [SLIDE] It is over 120 feet long and at its base is 13 feet around, as well as being 250 years old this year. Yet it has been expertly trimmed all those years and is still laden with the sweetest grapes each and every season.

A seasoned gardener can make a grapevine produce no matter how many years it has put behind it. It all comes down to the closeness of the main vine. It's about being tapped into the source of the best energy for growth.

There's a story about a missionary in Africa who lived in his central mission which had a small generator to supply current for his church and a small rectory. Some natives from an outlying mission came to visit the pastor. They noticed the electric light hanging from the ceiling of his living room. They watched wide-eyed as he turned the little switch and the light went on. One of the visitors asked if he could have one of the bulbs. The priest, thinking he wanted it for a sort of trinket, gave him one of the extra bulbs. On his next visit to the outlying mission, the priest stopped at the hut of the man who had asked for the bulb. Imagine his surprise when he saw the bulb hanging from an ordinary string. He had to explain that one needed to have electricity and a wire to bring the current to the bulb. We may share an understanding smile at the innocence of the African native, but we may not be much better.

In our text for today, Jesus tells a story about the importance of our connection to the true source of life. He uses the analogy of the vineyard of the vine and the branches. Just as the electricity provides the power necessary for the bulb to produce light, so the vine provides the life necessary for the branches to produce fruit.

In our gospel story today, Jesus likens us to those shoots that emerge from the main vine in Spring and stresses the importance of the fruit we bear. There's a lot we could unpack from the imagery these metaphors provide. First of all, there's the vital need for the branches to be close to the vine.

How much of our lives are guided by Jesus? It's easy to think that we go through the necessary faith motions; we show up for church every Sunday we can, we tithe regularly, we may even have a regular routine of bible study and prayer in our lives. And don't get me wrong, those are all wonderful practices and activities. But is the routine, the "going through the motions," what makes us valuable branches? Or does it involve a little more? Too often, we make our faith just another part of our daily, or weekly lives. We schedule it in our day like we would a trip to the grocery store; on Sundays it's another errand we have to run. We give it attention in the time we allot for it, then go about the rest of our lives.

As Americans, we tend to be fiercely independent folks. We are individuals first, and our personal priorities take precedence. Maybe it's our pioneering history that creates this sense of individualism, of doing for ourselves and focusing on our own individual priorities and journeys.

In telling this story, though, Jesus is stressing that our faith is not something that we work into our schedules. We are to "remain in him and he in us, or abide in him," as other translations word it. That is a 24/7 arrangement, not something we parcel out. So what does it look like to be an active branch on the vine? What does this mutual abiding

look like? What does bearing full, juicy fruit really mean? It doesn't mean we allot a set time to our faith like every other aspect of our lives. Our faith should permeate and guide every aspect of our lives. Let's remember that God is the vine grower. God is the one pruning those branches that bear fruit, and cutting away the ones that don't.

Our epistle reading this morning goes to great length to tell us what is important to God, what God is all about. "God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God in them." We only truly know God when the love of God flows through us. God's love is self-sacrificing.

The Greek word used for God in this passage is "agape." Unlike our English language, Greek has four distinct words for love. Agape is the one that is used to mean caring for the good of another. Like shalom, it's chief concern is the well-being of the other. It's putting our own interests aside. There's a reason our meal at love feast is called the "agape meal." We eat that meal after we have humbled ourselves in service to others.

Likewise, God has shown this self-sacrifice in his love for us, even to death on a cross. This "love of God" that is to abide in us is the antithesis of fear. We often think of hate as the opposite of love, but hate has fear as its underlying core. When we think of hate groups and discrimination, at their core is fear. The fear of change, of losing importance, of losing one's privilege and status in the culture. That fear becomes anger and hate towards what is perceived as a threat to one's "normal way of life." Yet in 1 John, we are told that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.." So if we abide in the love of God, we cannot abide in hate and fear. Do our actions support that? Do we still fear what's different from us, what may challenge what we consider to be "normal?" Do we find ourselves thinking less of those who are different than us: those who's culture or religious practices, skin color, or identities are different from what we've always considered the norm?

That brings me to the second item we can unpack from this metaphor of being branches on the Christ vine. As all beings that sprout from the love of God through Christ, the walk of faith we are called to is inherently a communal walk. What we do affects the other branches on the vine.

John tells us in our epistle reading this morning that the one thing we can't do is to claim to love God while refusing the love of the sister or brother in front of us. Love and hate cannot mix. Here John points us to the two great parallel commandments: love God and love your neighbor. These two are tied together, John tells us. Not only must we obey them both; it is impossible to obey the first without also obeying the second. We are all branches of the same vine, all the fruit we bear supports the vine, the body of Christ. Ours is a faith founded on community, not individualism.

When we allow ourselves to become too stuck on the modern idea of the sovereign individual, we can too easily see our life in community to be outside the central places of our lives. The church and our faith become something we are “part of”, apart from our major spheres of life in the world, at home, at work, in our families, etc. The imagery of the vine suggests otherwise. It is the nourishment we get from our faith walk together that should drive all other aspects of our lives.

Part of the problem is we have come to see “the church” over time, as tied to a building and the events that transpire there. That is why the early Brethren resisted having church buildings for a long time. The church is the people, the community of believers, not the events in a building. It is the body of Christ in the world, the vine in our story.

What we have to ask ourselves is what we are called to as branches on that vine? How do we make sure our branches produce juicy fruit instead of dried up raisins? From our epistle reading, it is clear that love is the core of whatever measurement we have for success. Are we abiding in God as God abides in us? Does God's self sacrificing love flow through us? Do we feel fear and hate or have we allowed God's love to drive that from us? We bear fruit in works of love and following the example of God's self-sacrificing love. We love those who are hard to love, those who make themselves unloveable. Those who are different from us, those who we are told we should fear and hate. Whether we like the idea or not, they too are branches on this vine. They are God's children as well. If we cannot find it in our hearts to allow God's love to flow from us, we should expect some pruning from the gardener, the vine grower. I pray it is only a pruning, and not being trimmed and cast aside. May we all strive to be the branches that bear abundant fruit. Amen.

Call to Serve.

Today we are invited to become deeply attached, close, and loyal as branches who are connected with Jesus Christ, our vine. In other words, we are to bear fruit with a spirit of love by helping each other, reaching out to each other, and encouraging each other in our daily faith pilgrimage. As it is written in the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, that “Two are better than one, because if they fall, one will lift up the other; but for the one who is alone and falls, there is not another to lift that person up.” So, let our offering lift up one another in God’s love that abides in times of sadness, loss and grief. Let our offering lift up one another in God’s love that abides in times of hopelessness, brokenness and failure. Let our offering be a thanksgiving of God’s love that abides within us times of hopefulness, forgiveness, unity, and peace.

And let us accept God's invitation to be ever-present in times of deep despair, and in times of great joy. Now, let us offer ourselves in gratitude and with generosity, as fruits representing the abiding goodness of God.

Call to Serve

As we seek to become a place of compassion we ask that you consider all the ways that you could help our community through prayers, participation, partnering, or philanthropy. Donations are always welcome, but there are many other ways to contribute as well. Sign up to be a worship leader. Reach out to a friend who might be lonely. Give a sandwich to somebody on the street. Keep your eyes open to opportunities and possibilities to make another person's day a little more hopeful. And pray for the courage to step out in faith when the time is right. It all begins and ends with prayer - in gratitude, in crisis, in reflection on the day's events. As we listen to Annie play, reflect on the blessings that are all around us, and give thanks for the time we have together.

A Time for Reflection

Played by church musician Annie Center

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

Faithful God, make our hearts bold with love for one another. Pour out your Spirit upon all people, that we may live your justice and sing in praise the new song of your marvelous victory. Amen.

Hymn

Strangers No More ~ 322

Benediction

The steadfast love of God endures forever. There is no limit to God's grace. You are God's beloved. You are forgiven and restored. Love one another deeply as God has loved you, and you will know the peace of Christ in your hearts. Amen.

Postlude

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