

April 28, 2024

Fifth Sunday of Easter



St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail

Fairview Heights, IL 62208

Telephone 397-6323

e-mail— stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by

Rev. Thom Shuman

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Here in this place of worship,
with the congregation of the faithful,
we lay down our fears, to boldly sing God's praise.
Here in the vineyard of the Lord,
with our sisters and brothers in Christ,
grandparents tell stories of faith

to little ones sitting on their laps.

Here where God waits to serve us at the Table:

we shall be so filled with love

that we will run to serve others.

CALL TO RECONCILIATION:

The seeds of grace, hope, joy, and love are planted deep with us, so they can bear fruit in our lives. But we resist staying connected to the Vine, thinking we can flourish on our own. Let us confess our sins, so we can once more feel God abiding deep within us. Please join me as we pray, saying.

UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:

Mother of Compassion: called to be one body,
we fragment ourselves into a million selfish pieces;
your children of love, we insist on the right to despise our
sisters and brothers; though your Perfect Love was broken
for us, we are afraid to give of ourselves to the world.
Abide in us, Vine Grower.

Forgive us of our sins, so we may live boldly,
love fearlessly, and proclaim unceasingly that Jesus Christ
is our Lord and Savior.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

Do you feel it – there, deep down in your hearts? God's
love is alive, beating, breathing – in you!
Because God abides in us, we can live for others, allowing
God's love to bear fruit in us. Thanks be to God, we are
forgiven! Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1-8

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. ² He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything. ⁶ If you don’t remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and, in this way, prove that you are my disciples.

MESSAGE: On this and the remaining two Sundays of the Easter Season, the Gospel lessons will be drawn from the farewell discourses and prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John (Chapters 14-17.) The setting for these lessons is immediately following what we call the Last Supper. After Judas leaves, Jesus continues to teach. These farewell discourses are sort of like the pep talk and last-minute instructions the coach gives before the team takes the field of play.

These four chapters address the question; What does the risen and later departing Christ have to say to his church? We can expect, therefore, that this section will be

rich in assurances, warnings, instructions, and promises. However, the form of the material presents difficulties for some preachers. There are frequent and lengthy repetitions. Repetition may bother some people, but I always say, and I’m sure I’ve said this before, if a teacher says something twice, be assured that it will be on the test.

I was looking at just that sort of thing this week. We HAVE been talking a lot about similar themes. For the last couple of weeks, we’ve been exploring such things as; wondering, convincing, believing, sheep, good shepherds and mostly, a lot of love. If you haven’t noticed, there’s a whole lot of love in this book, called the Bible. Today we have another lesson on love. Jesus is trying to convince us and have us believe, not that we are sheep, but we are branches.

Jesus loved to teach with metaphors and parables. Last week we had sheep. I don’t think that many of us have been sheep herders so that metaphor might have “missed” some of us. This week Jesus is giving lessons on gardening. Now that is something many of you know quite a bit about. Jesus uses grapes because that was important to making wine. You probably are more comfortable with tomatoes, or flowers, but I could be wrong.

I don’t know much about gardening, but somewhere along the way, I learned the difference between pruning and cutting off. If a branch is not helping that plant grow, get rid of it, cut it off. It’s just sucking up nutrients that are being wasted. Whereas, pruning something like a bush, will make the bush get fuller and stronger because the nutrients are going to healthy branches. Am I wrong about that?

That's exactly what Jesus is talking about in this metaphor. Branches that will not bear fruit are like people who won't bear fruit for God. The bad branches may infect the good branches and may kill the whole plant. The puny branches may block the efforts of the healthy ones, just as people who don't want to be on the vine can block the efforts of those who DO desire to participate in church and learning to be a better Christian. What is the fruit God wants us to bear? The fruit Jesus is talking about includes, not just winning souls, but answered prayer, joy, and love as mentioned in verses 7, 11, and 12 in Chapter 15 of John. In Galatians and 2 Peter other types of fruit includes qualities of Christian character.

The most important message of this parable is the fact that unhealthy branches that have left the vine are not helpful to build the kingdom of God. Only the branches that "hang on", or remain with the vine will flourish. Stick with the God who created you and you will have life abundantly. Don't leave the Jesus vine. Instead, remain and abide.

Here's your homework for the week. Think of ways we can nourish or fertilize ourselves so we can bear "fruit". REMEMBER, IT WILL BE ON THE TEST. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Blessed Vine grower, teach us to love one another with that passion which comes from your overflowing heart so those around us will recognize us as sisters and brothers, bound together by your love not divided by our fears. Teach us to serve one another with that compassion which comes from our broken heart, Vine of our lives,

for the hungry are our brothers,
the immigrants are our sisters,
the homeless are our families.

Teach us to include others with that embracing welcome which comes from your inviting heart, Fruit-bearing Spirit, offering forgiveness to those who hurt us, peace to all filled with hate, and hope to those burdened by despair.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION AND GRATITUDE FOR SHARING:

Thank you for sharing your gifts with St. John, especially during this time of limited gatherings. Your gifts allow us to keep the lights on and to do mission projects. Thank you again.

DOXOLOGY:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

From you comes every gift we need, every blessing we have. May we not hoard them for ourselves, but offer them back to you, that the poor might be fed, the lonely

befriended, and the despairing be filled with hope. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

BENEDICTION AND COMMISSION:

Go now, in the love of our God.

We will live for others through our God.

Go now, in the grace of Jesus.

We will forgive others, just as we have been forgiven.

Go now, in the community of the Spirit.

We will serve others in every need, in every place, in every heart.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Becky Ballard, Ronald Bopp, Jackie Canterbury, Sue Ganschietz, Josh Mueller, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, David Seneczyn, Yvonne Weber, Joan Williams, Rosemary Williams

**IF YOU HAVE A GRADUATE IN YOUR FAMILY,
PLEASE LET US KNOW. CALL OR EMAIL THE OFFICE.
KINDERGARDEN, MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL,
COLLEGE, GED, TRADE SCHOOL. ANY
GRADUATION. WE WILL NOTE IT IN OUR MAY
NEWLETTER.**