

Acts 8: 26-40
Psalm 22: 25-31
1 John 4: 7-21
John 15: 1-8

LOVING PRUNING

This Gospel always reminds me of Concord grapes and growing up in NH.
Evening walks down country roads were a highlight of my childhood.
It was a very small community in a back-woods that I grew up in.
And back in those days there wasn't much traffic on those roads.
So not much danger for five or six of us to walk right on the pavement,
 strolling along side by side in the dusk
 after the supper dishes were done and put away.
Most evenings, Mom and our next door neighbor Mrs. Buxton,
 would head for a walk with whoever else wanted to come along.
My grandmother would be in her apron,
 and us kids would hop on our two-wheelers,
 riding ahead, circling back from time to time for the slow-pokes.
The route was usually the same,
 but it didn't matter, because we knew all the roads
 and occasionally, a different route, for variety's sake.
Along the roads, many of them, Concord grapes grew - flowing over the stone fences.
Ancient vines of grapes, wild and carefree, seeds planted along the road,
 by humans or birds - who knew.
We could hardly wait until Fall when the multi-colors of the maples and birches
 joined with the scents of ripening grapes, and wild apples,
 prostituting themselves, seductively advertising their wares to us children.
We would zoom ahead on our bikes to pluck as many of those tart purple fruit.
Grandma would even fill her apron with some to take home for later treats,
 like concord jelly and apple pies.

Those vines and branches had not seen pruning for decades,
 except pelting rains, heavy snows, stinging wind,
 and the occasional passing vehicle who nipped an overly-adventurous vine.
Had they been pruned by a caring land-owner,
 the fruit may have been more plentiful, richer, larger in size, sweeter,
 but it didn't concern us - we enjoyed them just as they were -
 tart and flavorful.
I've always said that any plant that survives my gardening -
 I have a brown, rather than a green thumb -
 any plant that survives deserves to be in my garden!
No one likes to be pruned, especially children.
"No, I'm sorry; you can't."
"But why?"

“Because I said so; and don’t go asking your father!”
Snip goes the wild branch,
 and the bud goes stomping off the her room to sulk.
“But I want to.”
“I said, ‘No.’ And I mean it.”
“Why not?”
“Because I love you.”
 (Don’t you hate it when God uses that line!)
“Well, it’s just not fair.”
And the exchange ends once again in a stomp and slam.

It’s really isn’t fair we think,
 not so much that we aren’t allowed to do everything we want,
 but because She used the “Love Argument.”
“Riding your skateboard, Sarah, down the middle of Hill Street
 may look like lots of fun, not necessarily a good idea.”
Driving your car, Jim, when you’re having problems with your cataracts,
 isn’t safe - for you and for others.
“You really don’t have the time to...”

Leading Scouts in their Personal Management merit badge,
 I tell them the financial planning stuff is good,
 but if you can demonstrate to me that you can say,
 “Gee, I’d really love to, but I just can’t. Thanks, No.”

Trimming the schedule,
 cutting out expenses,
 curtailing habits.

Pruning.
Just being able to say, ‘No.’
And all of a sudden, you can begin to appreciate and revel
 in the perfection and satisfaction
 that pruning back can provide in your life.

We hate to curb any expressions of creativity,
 especially when it is believed that God’s Spirit is moving in and around us.
And that’s where discernment comes in,
 discernment, pruning to bear better fruit from the vine we grow from.
Sometimes that discernment of God’s gardening is with pruning shears,
 sometimes with fertilizer,
 sometimes it’s pulling out the old and planting new.
Being a part of the vine of Jesus is to be a family of support and love.
It’s what builds and maintains a strong community of support.
 It the love of being a part of a greater whole.
The vine of Jesus nourishes, sustains, and holds tightly onto its branches,
 and we hold on to each other.

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And when we prune the dead and unhealthy from our lives,
that makes our vine stronger,
and our faith community bear even greater more succulent fruit.

It always - always - comes down for love:
love of God for us, as the caring parent;
love of us for God, as the faithful children;
and love of us for each other, as the family of God
making the parish stronger,
and the Church bearing better, stronger, larger, and sweetening fruit -
the fruit of God's Spirit:
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,
gentleness, and self-control. *Galatians 5:22-23*

Saving the best for last -
self-control,
pruning.

Let us prune, feed, nurture, replant, and tend, the vine and aid the branches.
For, to quote the hymn we will sing later, "*ubi caritas*"
"God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there."

"Blessed, let us love another, as love is from God."

In the calm evening of life,
what a pleasant stroll we take
down quiet country roads with our Mother God
as we hold hands together
stopping along the roadside and sharing in the joy of the moment,
and the fruit sweet and savory:
the fruit of God's love,
and the fruit of God's Spirit.

AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(Have the group stand in a line holding hands.)

Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are his branches on that vine.
What do you think that means?

Now, hold on tight.

(take one of the children and create a 'storm' for the vine - pushing and pulling them.)

Wow! You guys held together pretty well, just like we used to play
Red Rover, Red Rover. Have you ever played that game?

Thursday for my birthday, Miss Sue took me to New York City
to see one of my favorite Broadway shows, called *Carousel*.
Perhaps the most beloved song from that musical goes like this:

When you walk through a storm keep your chin up high
And don't be afraid of the dark.
Walk on through the wind; walk on through the rain
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown
Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone.

I think that's what Jesus means today - we never need walk alone.
We have all these friends here, who are willing and ready to help us,
through any storm.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches,
and we are all connected together through Jesus' love.

Let's pray.