

## **Easter 5            Year B**

### **John 15:1-8**

#### The Epistle 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

#### The Gospel John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

**Prayer:**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

-- **AMEN**

**Homily:**

Most Episcopalians don't memorize quotes from the Bible.

But we do know a lot of Bible stories.

Most of us know that Jesus said something like

“I am the vine, and you, my disciples, are the branches.”.

*If God is The Grape Farmer, and Jesus is the Vine,*

*And the disciples are the branches, are we are the grapes?*

When I was a little boy, for a while, I stayed with my grandparents,

One their farm in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

They had a ton of cool stuff.

Pigs, chickens, and a milk cow, a big barn,

a big swing, a big red tractor, and a huge grape arbor.

*I always loved those big purple, seedy grapes.*

Grapes have always been a part of my life.

Dana and I raised our girls in Bakersfield,  
at the southern tip of California's Great Central Valley.

If you drive a few hours West, you've got the beach.

A few hours east, you've got the desert, or the High Sierra.

Just outside of town, there are the Sierra foothills,  
and the Mighty Kern River.

Two hours North of LA, over a mountain range,  
Bakersfield isn't the California everyone dreams of.

Bakersfield isn't movie stars and surfers.

It's Merle Haggard, and Dwight Yoakum and Buck Owens.  
It's cowboys and ranchers, fieldworkers and farmers,  
school teachers, politicians, wanna-be surfers,  
Catholics, Bible Pounders, and a few Episcopalians.

It's flat, dry, dusty and hot.<sup>i</sup>

It's home.

*It's the land of Big Agriculture and Big Oil.*

Surrounding Bakersfield are endless groves of orange and  
lime trees, pistachios, and almonds,  
nectarines and peaches<sup>ii</sup>.

1,000's and 1,000's of acres, of neat, straight, well irrigated  
rows of carrots and lettuce, and potatoes. and cotton fields.  
And everywhere, grapes, grapes, and more grapes –  
Growing sweet, and heavy on the vine.<sup>iii</sup>

The field hands would always miss a few grapes, and  
I'd pick those raisins from the vines,  
when I was hunting Dove, out there, every Fall.  
*A Perfect Day!*<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus must've liked grapes. He talked about them a lot!  
Sometimes, I feel like he's talking to me.

*God is the grape farmer, and Jesus is the Vine.*

The farmer chooses where to plant her orchard. So does God.  
There's nothing random about farming!

*With God there are no accidents.*

But we all make mistakes. In real life there are always accidents!

Some of us grow ripe and sweet,

but others dry up in the bright sun, and drop off the vine.

*God finds good in everything! A dried-up grape is still a raisin.*

*In God's economy, there's always hope.*

*With God, no one is utterly lost, and nothing goes to waste.<sup>v</sup>*

Grapevines and vineyards were part of Jesus' everyday life.

When He said, "I am the *true vine*", he used a familiar metaphor.

- There's an Old Testament "Song of the Vineyard."<sup>vi</sup>
  - Jesus knew that one, for sure!
- Jesus had been to Jerusalem many times.<sup>vii</sup>
  - He must have known that there was a vine, with clusters of grapes, engraved on the Temple's façade.<sup>viii</sup>

*Jesus takes something familiar, and makes it new.<sup>ix</sup>*

*"If I'm the vine, and my disciples are the branches," he said,*

*then y'all are the grapes."*

To be a grape on Jesus' vine is a very good thing! .

We are a people of God's own heart. Every one of us has a purpose!

Every woman and every man. Every child.

Every size. Every shape.

Every continent. Every flag.

Red, brown, yellow, black and white. We are precious in His sight!

We are a people of God's own heart. But God gave us free will.

So, life is complicated. We all fall short.<sup>x</sup>

*Some grapes will always dry up, before the harvest.<sup>xi</sup>*

In today's Gospel Jesus warned us that, if we choose to dry up,  
the Father might pluck us off the branch.

*Sounds kind of harsh.*

“Whoever doesn't abide in me is thrown away like a branch...;

... gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

*Jesus wasn't kidding! It's definitely ...harsh.<sup>xii</sup>*

Sometimes, even the most loving parents choose

to let their child go his or her own way. *That's really tough.*

In the real world, when we're "cut off", from the branch,  
it's hard to recover. I know that. *I had to prune myself!*

Sometimes God cuts us off.<sup>xiii</sup> *Well, sort of. Not quite.*

*God's grace and patience never runs completely dry.*

Peter asked Jesus:

"How many times must I forgive my brother?" "*Seven times?*"

"*not seven times*", Jesus said, "*but seventy times seven.*"<sup>xiv</sup>

*That's how God rolls.*

Whatever kind of grape we are, wherever we're growing,

The Good Farmer never gives up!

"If you abide in me ...", Jesus said, "Ask for whatever you wish,

and it will be done.... You [will] bear much fruit ...."

God takes the old, familiar thing, and makes it brand new.

The Lord's grace and patience never run dry....

*In Jesus' Vineyard, It's good to be a grape!*

**-AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Bakersfield is mostly Republicans, and trucks, with lots of Democrats from LA, in their Honda's. It's where the Kern River usually runs dry, but escapees and runaways from LA flow in.

<sup>ii</sup> aka "stone fruit".

<sup>iii</sup> Used to ride my horse, Jake, all around out there, with my cowboy buddy, John.

<sup>iv</sup> We loved it! A great place to raise our girls.

<sup>v</sup> ... God always finds a way Even in the midst of our hunger, our fear, our sin, our fear and our anger!

<sup>vi</sup> ...where God is the gardener. See, Is. 5:1-7.

<sup>vii</sup> Did he know that a grape vine would symbolize Jerusalem, on the coins of the 1st Jewish revolt against Rome.ca, 66-70 CE? During the Siege of Jerusalem, ca. 70 CE, the Romans destroyed that Temple, and plundered many artifacts, including the Menorah.

<sup>viii</sup> See, Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.395.

<sup>ix</sup> With Jesus, it's never too late.

<sup>x</sup> Some of us more than once!

<sup>xi</sup> Some of us to dry up and become a raisin.

<sup>xii</sup> The notion that actions have consequences, both in this life and the next, isn't very popular these days.

<sup>xiii</sup> It does happen.

<sup>xiv</sup> See, Matthew 18:21-22 (ESV), [https://www.openbible.info/topics/gods\\_forgiveness](https://www.openbible.info/topics/gods_forgiveness)