

Easter 5 year B Acts 8:26-40, Psalm 22:26-32, 1 John 4:7-21, John 15:1-8

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Abide in Jesus and bear fruit

*Lord may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable
to you now and always. Amen*

The world is a fragmented place, or at least it appears so. It also seems like quite a crazy place. If we look around what do we see? If we look at the international scene we see nations and groups in countries that push and pull against each other in the struggle for limited resources, everyone wanting more of what is available. And with that perspective we end up with war after war. I don't know about you but I look at what is happening in Iraq, Dafur, Afghanistan and so many other places and I can feel in total despair. Each country in a sense stands on its own and battles in one way or another for what it thinks it needs. In all of this too the environment is abused and damaged. We all have heard the discussions on climate change, the problems of salination and all the rest. We are disconnected from our world in the most fundamental sense.

Australia is no different of course but we all seem quite blind to what is going on. I noticed this week that the government has very skillfully introduced legislation to the lower house that would change the status of refugees arriving by boat. This has been done in week where the budget is the big news along with the rescue of the Beaconsfield miners. We are so busy congratulating ourselves on being fiscally strong and counting our pennies that we forget what Jesus calls the "weightier things of the law". We forget that we have neighbors who need us. We forget that our blessings are for other people not just us. Refugees are just one group that suffers because of this mindset. There are many others.

And then there is the fragmentation in our hearts, the disconnection in our very being. We live in such a technologically rich culture, with contraptions with bells and whistles that separate us from our surroundings and ourselves. We rush from place to place, we hop in our cars and zip here and there, we take on too much and complete nothing, as we would really like. As we rush about, as we sit in front of the television or the computer what is happening in our souls? What is happening in our bodies? Do we even know? Maybe we only begin to know when a headache comes, our back aches or we feel so down and depressed. If we are disconnected from ourselves then we are sure to be disconnected from those around us, those we love and we are sure to be disconnected from God.

Maybe we come to church to reconnect and in fact I think that is one of the main functions of a church community. The original meaning of the word religion is to 'bind back to' to re-connect with'. All religions serve this function to a degree. Jesus Christ talked to his followers about being re-connected to God and each other. Repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are all words we use to describe this process. In today's gospel Jesus gives us a wonderful picture of being connected and what can come of that connection.

Jesus tells his listeners that he is the true vine and urges his listeners to abide in him just as he abides in them. I just want to have a little digression into some new testament Greek. I am usually loath to bring that into sermons but knowing just a little here can deepen our understanding of what Jesus was saying. At the beginning of the passage Jesus says, "I am the true vine". In John's gospel there are many instances of Jesus using this 'I am' phrase – I am the way, I am the life, I am the resurrection are just some. If we look at the Greek, *ego eimi*, there is a real depth to the phrase. In each case where "I am" appears, the translation could also be "I have timeless being" or "I have timeless being as or I eternally exist as..."). So hold that there in your mind. The other word I want to look at is abide. In the passage Jesus says, "Abide in me as I abide in you" and that we are the branches of the vine. Abide is an old world but the Greek word *meno* that it comes from in our translations can also mean live, dwell, endure and continue.

So if you put the two ideas together you have this truly wonderful picture. Jesus timelessly and eternally

exists as the true vine and we are invited to dwell with Jesus in this reality. We are invited to continue in all places and times, connected to Jesus.

Now I think we can tie ourselves in knots with this passage. What should be for us a life giving passage becomes a cause for spiritual naval gazing and distress. Am I abiding in Jesus? Am I as connected, as I should be? Am I bearing good fruit? Is this community bearing fruit? Are we connected? And so on. Deep memory is excavated by those words: and an entire libretto of frozen feelings, from "I tried that" to "pious claptrap" to "let's get on with living in the real world."

We can also hear the phrase about "bearing more fruit" as a demand that we get cracking and strain hard to bear much fruit if we want Christ to abide with us. When we do this we turn the good news on its head. Scripture tells us that God is love and Jesus tells us that he abides in God's love and that we dwell in Jesus and Jesus dwells in us. This is beyond struggle and confusion. It is beyond our feeble attempts to understand and meet benchmarks – good fruit, bad fruit, good wood, dead wood. It just is. Jesus presents us with a simple promise: trust yourself to the eternal reality of love and let God take you where you need to go. Let God be the gardener, the vine-growing, of your soul.

You know, you can't make a vine produce fruit by yelling at it, "START PRODUCING FRUIT!" Nothing would happen. Once the gardeners have done their jobs, all the branches have to do in order to bear fruit, is to **stay connected** to the vine. Such transformation comes from connectedness, not from effort

The gospel is a gospel of grace not judgement, condemnation and spiritual abuse. The only thing we need to do is stay connected. How do we do that? Prayer and meditation –taking time to breath deeply and connect with our selves, others and the God of love. As you go throughout the day taking those micro moments to say "Hello God. still there? I am". Taking some time to look around and know that you are part of this beautiful creation that is indwelt by the God who is love. Look at the trees, the clouds, the leaves and feel the wonder of life. Those practices will help us know we are connected, perhaps feel connected, but the reality is we don't have to conjure any magical connection up, it just is. We just have to know it.

I spoke at the beginning about the fragmentation we experience in our world, the

disconnection we perceive and encounter day to day. The enormous problems we see the world experiencing. The disconnection in ourselves. As followers of Christ we are called to work to heal those wounds. We are called to transformation. That is the social justice side of a truly Christian life but the way to sustain that action over the long term, to bear fruit that is from God in the struggle to walk with those in need is by being connecting to God the source of love. God's love to us is inexhaustible and we must love others from the bedrock of God's love for us.

As we come to the Lord's table and share in communion we remember that we are bound to Jesus Christ, we are bound together in love, we are bound to the source of life. We are the branches on the vine. And we pray we will bear the fruit of justice, mercy and peace.

Amen.
