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John 15:9-17

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***John*** ***15:9-17***

***(I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide 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. 5I 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. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.)***

***9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.***

I think my plant has been listening to all of our conversations about belonging lately because clearly it feels as if it belongs here in this room – just look at how healthy it looks!

Today we will be continuing our conversation about belonging as we look at the second half of the vine and branches story. First, there is the timeline to consider. Or rather, timelines. The linear viewpoint.

Timeline of the events themselves that are being narrated.

Timeline of the community in which the writing of the narrative is happening.

Timeline of the community that is hearing the narrative.

Which means that every community that has heard this text, has been a part of the narration itself, again and again, throughout the generations from then until now – and into the future. This time continuation that connects us to the past, is an important comforting part of the vine analogy.

Abiding in Christ’s love is the fuel for this gospel train that runs throughout time, like a train on a track, picking up more traction at each stop.

Gospel of John allows us to remain on that vine, no one knowing where it will end – we just keep doing our part – on this leaf, or that one.

And then there is the depth and abundance that texts of the Gospel of John give us. The vertical timeline, if you will. The gospel writer never writes Jesus’ words just once. It’s as if Jesus can’t say all that he needs to say in one group of words.

* For example, “I am the bread of life. I am the bread *that comes down from heaven*.”
* Or, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Abide *in my love* as I love you.” Abide, remain, stay connected to not just me, but stay connected to all that you know of me from my love for you.
* And also, as in the text from last week and this week. Remain a branch on this vine so that you can bear fruit. Bear fruit *that will last*.”

Lastly, about today’s text, we are introduced to Jesus’ words that we are no longer servants but friends. “Friend” is just another word for loved ones. Not Facebook, not buddies, not even besties. In the ancient world, the word used here for friend, meant any person whos relationship was not a social construct. Think about your identity in relationship to people in your life – what are some?

Mom, Dad, Aunt, Uncle, levels of family members, boss, employee, co-worker, acquaintances. , Now think of all of the built in expectations that come with these? Obligations that make a system function – a family system, a work system, a cultural system. Many of these obligations are certainly supported and given life by the love that exists in the relationship. Not all obligations are love-less.

Now think about how a friend, is not someone that functions to make a cultural system work.

Abiding in Jesus’ love, staying connected to all that is the Word of Christ, the same way that you would to anyone you are not socially obligated to, allows us to be devoted in a way unlike any other – not better than, not instead of, but in a completely unencumbered way.

Think of the freedom that brings!

The Easter season will end in two weeks. Next Sunday we will read about Jesus’ final ascension to heaven and the following Sunday we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit – the Advocate -- the one Jesus sent to be with us in his place, until he comes again.

In the weeks since Jesus’ resurrection on Easter, we have followed the disciples through their disbelief and astonishment, through their post-resurrection time spent with him, and in these final weeks, we share some of the disciples wariness, as they wonder what in the world they will ever do without Jesus, down here on earth with us. It’s almost as if these last few Sundays are another kind of period of Lent, where we think we know what’s happening – and then everything changes.

Just like when Christ was born, the good news didn’t happen in Jesus’ lifetime. Just like when Jesus died and rose, the good news of Jesus’ resurrection doesn’t appear to last either.

Fortunately, we have been a part of that continuing vine and *have* heard this story narrated all of the way through. The disciples are frozen in time in our reading – but being of the vine, we know what they did not know and we will celebrate those things in the next few weeks.

As Christians, this is the story that we belong to. This is the true vine that holds us up, that nurtures us, feeds us, and only requires of us that we love one another.

Let us pray…