

Sunday, April 29, 2018

I John 4: 7-21

John 15:1-8

Attached to the Vine

There was a man who ordered a tree house kit over the internet. The box arrived and it had printed on the top the words that have become a parent's nightmare—"some assembly required."

The man began to assemble the tree house by looking at the instructions, laying out all the pieces on the ground and to his dismay realized something quite profound. The instructions he had received were indeed for a tree house but the parts did not seem to match up. The next day he sent an angry email message to the company complaining about the problem.

The reply came back—try using the instructions given and put it together, see what it is at the end. So the man looked at the pieces of lumber and the nails and the tarp and thought I can do this! I can make these into a tree house. After a few hours had gone by, the pieces of lumber started to resemble something amazing. The parts as he had put them together were for a sail boat. So he emailed the company again complaining about what was in the box of pieces the instructions and how it was he was to use this boat.

The reply came back: "We are truly sorry for the error and the mix-up and the inconvenience. However, it might make you feel better to consider the fascinating possibility that somewhere today there is a man out on a lake trying to sail your tree house."

The point of this story is that in order to put something together, you have to have the right parts and the right instructions. This is where faith comes in. The only way you can put your life together is through faith. Faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

And this is what Jesus was talking about as he was teaching his followers prior to Judas' betrayal and his subsequent arrest and trial. In our reading from John 15 Jesus is sharing in the last of his seven "I am" sayings recorded by John. Throughout John's gospel Jesus shares his teachings about who he is by sharing first person narratives to describe himself in order that others might understand his relationship with people, God the Father and to tell others what was to come after his arrest and trial.

Jesus stated "I am the bread of life - 6:35, I am the light of the world - 8:12 & 9:5, I am the gate for the sheep - 10:7,9, I am the good shepherd - 10:11,14, I am the resurrection and the life - 11:25, I am the way and the truth and the life - 14:6 and then he says,"I am the true vine - 15:1,5.

Up until this point the disciples are still not understanding what Jesus came to say and do and so Jesus uses the opportunity of the Seder supper of the Passover to share these words so that they might understand who he is. The Seder supper includes eating special foods as well as different types of fruit including grapes and drinking wine. He then tells his closest friends I am the true vine. He said this in order to get their attention for they still did not know that he was going to die and rise again. And so Jesus is giving them further instructions about who he is as God's Son and what this relationship means to them as his followers.

When Jesus said, "I am the true vine." Many of those around the table would be knowledgeable about how grapes grow as many of them were not only fishers but people who had connections to those who worked the land or owned vineyards. They would know that in order to grow grapes, a main vine is planted and grows upwards. As the vine matures branches come off that vine and in today's vineyards these branches are attached to wires or leads that enable the fruit to hang from the branch when it is producing the fruit.

Jesus then gives them a lesson in what is involved in caring for the vineyard—branches which no longer bear fruit are cut off with pruning shears. They then dry out and wither away. They are thrown into piles and burned. The branches which remain are expected to bear fruit but they can only do so if they are still connected to the main vine.

Jesus emphasizes the need for the vine and the branches to be connected and how with clear pruning instructions, the grapes will produce. But if the vine comes out of the ground there is no root and everything dies. Jesus wanted the disciples to know that they needed to keep connected with him that is to abide with him in order to live life to its fullest. His instructions were clear- abide with me, and live. Be the branches on my vine and produce fruit or die. But they did not understand.

Today God has welcomed Nathan into his family through the waters of baptism. The promises made by his parents are the beginning of his life's journey as he is now a little sprout on the vine of Jesus Christ. As he grows up there will be new growth and understanding of his place in the world and particularly as he grows up knowing who Jesus is and can be in his life. This is also true for one of us who is attached to the vine of Christ Jesus by promises made when younger or by the profession of faith in recent times. We are the branches of Christ in the Kingdom of God, and we are expected to produce good fruit. If we do not the Gardener will cut us off. But are we willing to produce the fruit of spiritual life? And no, we're not speaking of spiritual apples, grapes, pears, or peaches;. we are talking of what's going on in the orchard of your life. What are you producing?

As we read in John's first letter he emphasizes the need to produce spiritual fruit especially the need to love one another. Even though we will never fully love like God loves us we are to try. God's love for us is much deeper than the strongest relational bond of love on earth. He loves us with a divine everlasting love. We are to love each other because God loves and if we do not love as we should we are not loving the way God intends. God lives in those who are attached to the vine Jesus and if we truly and really love one another God's love is made complete. John also writes that if we acknowledge Jesus as God's Son the relationship is mutual—God lives within and we live in God. This is truly being attached to the vine. Hearing the stories of Jesus and listening to his instructions. Being attached to the vine means sharing the good news of Jesus' resurrection and telling others what a difference Jesus can make in one's life.

As Christians, we cannot live the Christian life and be fruitful apart from Jesus any more than any branches can live after being pruned away from the vine. Every branch draws its identity, its sustenance, its life from the vine. And just like a grape vine there are no two branches alike and yet they are all the same. This is paradoxical but it is true. Every Christian is unique and yet every Christian is the same. How we identify ourselves is derived from the Vine. We are known by the Vine. We receive our sustenance and life from the Vine and this is Jesus Christ our Risen Saviour. The question we need to ask and respond to is simply this: are you attached to the vine? Are you producing fruit blessed by the Spirit of God and created in love?

We are all branches connected to the vine of Christ whether we are seeking to build a tree house or set sail in a boat, Christ has instructed us very clearly on how we are to be in relationship with him.: I am the true vine-you are the branches. Live in me and I will live in you. Are you attached to the vine?

Let us pray;

Jesus our Saviour the true vine of life. We pray that we may attach our lives to you so that we are one with you in faith and filled with love. Show us how to live and love others so much that other people will know we belong to you by what we say and do. Call us O God to abide with you