

Barre Congregational Church

May 2, 2021: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fifth Sunday of Easter ~

“Abide In Me”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: John 15 v 1-8

I. Introduction:

The fruit we eat is such a gift to humanity...apples, oranges, bananas, strawberries, mangos, kiwi fruit and more, it is such a pleasure to have them all around, to enjoy their taste, and to benefit from their nutritional value. I love most fruit, but especially grapes. I grew up in the area in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, where we are surrounded by vineyards and wine farms. Those of you who grow grapes or have lived in and traveled to places like California where grapes are so familiar, know how distinct these vineyards can be in their looks, and how nice it is to grow one's own grapes. What did Jesus mean when He referred to Himself as the Vine in our passage? He emphasized the importance of identifying with it, and included the disciples in their own relationship with Him.

II. Jesus, the True Vine

Jesus' conversation with His disciples here in the Gospel of John occurs within the context of Him preparing to leave this earth and to be the God. In Chapter 14 He comforts His disciples and encourages them not to be troubled, but to trust in Him and in God. He is going away to prepare room for them in the heavens where God is. He then promises them that they will not be alone, but will receive the Holy Spirit, the One who will be with them, comfort them and teach and remind them of everything Jesus taught them.

Here in Chapter 15, He then goes on to discuss the close relationship He has with His disciples and they with Him. He uses the image of the vine as He describes their relationship...He is the Vine, and they are the branches, and if they remain in the Vine, they will be fine. The vine is one of the most important products of Palestine. It was extensively cultivated by the Jews. It is also an Old Testament symbol for Israel whom God brought from Egypt and cared for. The vine

in the Old Testament also refers to Israel as faithless, or being an object of severe punishment, according to Leon Morris in his book on John. We see the OT description of that in Jeremiah 2 v 21, ***“I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me, into a corrupt, wild vine?”*** Israel as the vine is therefore now replaced by Jesus Christ, the True Vine, who stays true to God and to His disciples. “I am the True Vine, and my Father is the Gardener”, He says. That relationship between Him and God is solid, because God acts at the Gardener, who ensures that the vine and the branches remain in good standing, connected and healthy, and produces healthy fruit. As the Gardener, God also ensures that every branch that does not bear fruit, gets cut off, and the ones that bear fruit gets pruned and bear more fruit. Jesus understands this dynamic and offers His solid union with God as an important gift to them as His disciples.

III. Abide in Me

All will be well with you, if you as the branches remain in me as the Vine, He says. I will remain in you, and this mutual indwelling, as it is called by some theologians will be a blessing to them. If they abide in Him, they will bear fruit. But more...the continuous deepening of their relationship with Him will bring them to another spiritual level, where if His words remain in them, they will ask Him whatever they want, and it will be given to them. Their prayers will come alive and will all be heard and answered. Their relationship with Him and their fruitful service will be to the glory of God, and from there all blessings will come upon them! This powerful declaration lays the foundation of a present and future relationship with Jesus Christ, God Most High and the Holy Spirit, a relationship they as disciples would benefit from through their lives in prayer, but it is also a promise to the church then, and now that Christ lives within us and brings our prayer lives to life as we lean on Him and His words of promise and blessing.

IV. Conclusion

My father planted grapes in our front yard, where the vine would be led up the pillars, and the branches would grow along the sides of the roof of the canopy where his pickup truck was parked. It was a such a pleasure to watch the grapes ripening in summertime, as we were enjoying our conversations on the front porch. I noticed in recent years that my brothers continue the tradition of planting grapes in their yards, taking after our father. It is lovely to see, and to be reminded of my father as I see their little vineyards bear fruit when I visit!

Perhaps you too have a vineyard, or grapes growing in your yard, or maybe you have apple or peach trees, or strawberries or blue berries. Whatever the fruit or veggies you and I plant, we know that there is a connection between the fruit and the branches, small or large. May we be reminded that, as we observe the new growth of fruit hanging out there soon, we too are bearers the fruit of the Spirit of God, the love and compassion of God in us and through us, and for one another. Christ is reminding us this morning to abide in Him, our Vine, whatever our circumstances are. He encourages us to stay connected with Him, to allow the Holy Spirit to help us, pray with us, counsel us, and guide us. He encourages us to not break that connection, but to keep His words, His utterances alive in us, so all our prayers will be heard and answered. This is an incredible promise, which speaks to us at a deep level of commitment and blessing. Let us remember this encouragement as we look to celebrate Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the next coming weeks.

May God bless you. Amen

.