

May 2, 2021
sermon

The Story of Jesus, The True Vine"

Good morning.

John 15, verse 5 tells us: 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.

Jesus is the vine.

We extend from the vine as branches. We are rooted in and draw strength and life from Jesus. We are intimately connected to him. If we were cut off from Jesus, separated, we would perish like a branch chopped off from its vine.

How do we extend our branches out from our congregations collectively and individually? In many ways.

Donations to food banks, youth groups, prayer chains, and choirs are several ways that come to mind. Individually, we all reach out, branch out, in our own quiet ways, extending and connecting to the vine.

Segregation is the enforced separation from the vine of racial groups.

How many of us are familiar with the name Viola Desmond?

Viola was a black woman ahead of her time in 1946. She was a resident of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. A night out at the movies became a night in prison, when Viola sat in a main floor seat of the theatre. The main floor was reserved for whites: she was asked to move to the balcony which was where the Black patrons were expected to sit. Viola refused and was dragged from the theatre.

Existing laws were used to sanction her for breaking the UNWRITTEN rules of segregation. Viola was charged with tax evasion for failing to pay the full tax on a main floor movie ticket - a difference that amounted to only one cent.

Although Viola lost her appeal to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, she helped to galvanize Canada's civil rights movement.

Viola must have been tired. Tired of living in a world in which separation from each other was preferable to being connected with one another.

Separated from the vine, an entire race was denied connection to the greater community by racism.

We are now in a year long separation from each other.

Oh, we have found ways to connect. Telephone and cellphone conversations, Zoom church services, coffee time and meetings.

We remain connected to the vine, but at the same time separated from each other

The Old Testament is full of imagery where Israel is referred to as God's special vine. Isaiah 5 is a love song to a vineyard that has produced bloodshed instead of justice. The imagery is being repeated in John 15 to an Israel that now contains Gentiles. We read, I am the true vine, and my father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, to make it bear more fruit. 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 that 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 and withers. My father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my followers.

As branches of the vine, our fruitfulness does not depend upon any individual effort, but rather it is wholly dependent upon the nurture provided by the vine. Members of the church community are known for the love they do in common with all the other members in union with Christ.

God, the vinegrower determines what is fruitful. God holds all members of the community accountable to one standard of fruitfulness, which for us is based in love. And we must be mindful that the community is not comprised of individuals with individual gifts working towards individual salvation but the mutual working out of love. This is the mark of a faithful community: not who its members are, but how it loves. So, let's take a minute and reflect. A slow deep breath. Think back to over a year ago. Isolating. How long? Weeks turned to months. Many alone. Separated and alone. We miss being in community with one another. Separated from the vine. Viola Desmond felt that she was not a part of the greater community, not a part of the vine.

Racism continues today.

It thrives in laws that haven't changed in 100 years. It thrives in a million micro aggressions

That people of colour face every day.

There is a duality to our lives as Christians that is both a gift and a task.

He summons us to a fruitfulness that does not simply occur absent of participation in the life of the community, but occurs with the promise and assurance that we are surrounded on every side with Grace

The bearing of fruit depends on community, it depends on connection.

Bearing fruit as disciples of Jesus Christ has everything to do with who we are in connection - in relationship with one another.....with Christ

Christ's words are a promise that we are ever connected to the Vine.

Beloved people of the vine, we must commit to restore the connection. We must commit to ensure that no one is made to feel tired of being cut off. We must be the ones to

restore, not break. We need to offer hope, not despair. We must be the ones to offer the unbreakable connection to the community of Christ. We must be kind. The unbreakable connection will enable us to bear much fruit, and ensure that all of the Viola Desmonds of the world can no finally no longer be tired. Amen.

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