

April 28, 2024  
Fifth Sunday of Easter

**Meditation:** “He’s DeVine, and We’ze De Branches”

This past week Barbara and I have been taking note of all the plants that are starting to blossom. The redbuds are just starting to blossom and should be beautiful this next week with the warmth and the rain. Same with the sandcherries. But I haven’t seen any buds yet on the dwarf Korean lilac at our building. I wonder, did they prune it at the wrong time in the season? The buds form up in the late summer and fall, and if you prune them after the buds have formed, you get no blossoms in the spring. You are supposed to prune them right after they finish blossoming.

I know that because we used to have a dwarf Korean lilac in our yard in Chatham. It grew to be about six feet in diameter and about five or six feet tall. One year we had a lot of snow, for Chatham, and the bottom third of the plant was buried. There were a lot of bunnies in the neighbourhood and they snacked on tips of the branches as far up as they could reach – about the middle third of the plant. In the spring, when it blossomed, it looked like some sort of weird Oreo cookie – the top and bottom thirds were lilac in colour while the middle third was green.

Some plants you prune in the spring, after blossoming, others you prune in the fall, and others it doesn’t matter. I wonder, does it matter when you prune a grape vine? Do you prune them in the fall, or in the spring, or does it matter? And why prune a grape vine at all?

On the gardening show on CBC radio I heard that when you prune a plant you want to keep the three ds in mind. You get rid of what is dead, what is diseased, and what is not desirable. Dead is easy to figure out. To spot disease might take a trained eye, but how do you tell what is desirable and what is not?

So off to Google: pruning grape vines. Apparently you prune grape vines about a month before spring. The biggest mistake people make is not pruning off enough. In other words, show no mercy when pruning. Year one, when you plant a vine, you watch for the growth and then in the winter you prune back to the healthiest two canes. Year two, you watch the growth and prune back to the healthiest two canes, which you can then start training along a wire

or cross piece. Year three, you may start to see grape production, and in the winter you prune back again.

Pruning is done to optimize the production potential of the vine. Too many canes taking energy and/or too many leaves making shade result in low grape yield and undesirable qualities in the grapes. What you want to do is maintain a balance between vegetative growth and fruit. Ultimately, pruning makes the vine hardier and stronger and healthier. And oh, by the way fruit only grows on new canes, so after a harvest, off they come.

Boy, can you imagine if we did this to ourselves? What is dead? What is diseased? What do we need to prune off and burn? What is not desirable for our future? “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” (Matthew 5:30) How do we train the parts that we keep? “Keep your tongue from evil/slander.” (Psalm 34:13/Wisdom of Solomon 1:11)

Can you imagine if we applied this to the church? Same questions: What is dead? What is diseased? What do we need to prune off and burn? What is not desirable for our future? How do we train the parts that we keep?

That is exactly the type of conversation we need to have, continually. In May, the Central Board will be grappling with the things necessary for our continued health and our future. What do we need to prune away? How do we train new behaviours and habits? And there is a bigger thing to be considered in all of this. We need to remember that it is not about us, but about God in whom we are rooted, about Jesus to whom we are grafted, about the Holy Spirit who flows from the root, through the vine, right to the tips of the branches, nourishing us.

The mission of a grape vine is to grow grapes suitable for a particular purpose. Some are grown to be eaten fresh. Others are grown to be dried into raisins. Still others are grown to make various types of wines. There are many varieties of grapes grown, but the mission is the same, to grow grapes.

The mission of God’s church is to bless the world. How we do that varies from congregation to congregation, just as the variety of grape varies from vine to vine.

Do you remember last week when I asked for your input, in twelve words or less, with a verb, a subject, and an outcome, on what you thought the mission of this congregation is?

As outsiders, Barbara and I looked at your actions: the Holy Diner and the collections for the food bank, the Sunday morning coffee time and the Wednesday morning coffee time, the Thorndale dinner theatre, the Ham and Oyster supper, and the Seder supper. We also looked at the online services that are viewed by several at Dorchester Terrace, in Alberta, in Florida, in London, and elsewhere. Collectively we came up with what we see as your mission, according to your actions: *Feeding souls and bellies in Dorchester and beyond*.

I'll have to read through your submissions and see what you think. Whatever the mission is, it is the core, the two central canes, that we don't prune back. It is the prime directive that should drive all other decision making.

Keeping with the mission Barbara and I came up with: *feeding souls and bellies in Dorchester and beyond*, does zoom worship and posting the recorded service on our website serve the mission? Would, say, a renovation of the kitchen serve the mission? How does anything we might do or think of serve the mission?

What do we let go of, prune off, because it does not serve the mission of our congregation, or runs counter to it, sucking up energy and other resources, resulting in a reduced outcome?

How do we train the two canes, our behaviour and our thinking, to best serve the mission? What new directions will we grow in; what new things might we try? What if we were to hold worship here in the sanctuary three Sundays a month and run it at Dorchester Terrace on the fourth Sunday? What if we ran the Holy Diner once a month, for twelve months? What if....

May God helps us to clarify our mission in Dorchester in 2024 and beyond. May God inspire our passion for our mission. May God be with us as we prune off those parts that don't serve, or take away from our mission. May God help train us to grow in the ways that best serve our mission. May we produce much good fruit for God's mission here, now and into the future. May it be so. Amen.