**4/28/24**

**Choice, Commitment, Pruning, & Abiding**

**John 15:1-8**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning to everyone who joined us here on the conference call, and good morning to those of you out there in the pews. I am glad everyone woke up and chose to join us this morning. Yes…. it is very much a choice to join with one another for Worship as we come to recognize that there are so many other distractions and things out there in the world that sometimes are so much easier and even tempting to be connected to. I mean for some of us we might even admit that it was tempting and would have been easier to stay connected to the very covers that we were under in our beds last night and this morning, and I am sure many of us at times would much rather stay wrapped up in the warmth and comfort of our slumbers. So, with that being said, being here is never taken lightly. The very effort of getting up and throwing on some clothes and getting out of the house to get here to church, or even picking up your phone and dialing the numbers to get on the conference call may not seem like much sometimes. That thought process and effort is also due to the fact that we have all too often familiarized ourselves with being here on a Sunday morning, as quite frankly it is kind of conditioned within us. However, that doesn’t mean that it still does not makes it a choice, and for that very fact it also makes it a commitment too, and a very important one at that. We often identify with the fact that it is what we need, and Worship and the people here are what we need to connect to. You and I continue to make the commitment to choose to come here to continue to gain strength for and from one another. We come to the realization that we have a commitment to one another to grow as well. We also choose to come together to further establish our connection with the Lord Our God, and with that we actually come for the essential pruning we need whether we realize it or not at times. I know that is actually some rather awkward wording there for sure, but I promise we will dive into things today and really try and explore what all this choice, commitment, and vine talk is about. Let alone why it is so vital to allow for pruning and for us to abide in the Lord our God, and even more vital to allow Our Lord and Savior to abide in us!

With all of that being said so far, I do not want to forget to extend continued Easter Blessings to each and every one of you out there, and to your family and friends as well. It is truly a blessing to remember and be able to announce that He has Risen, He has Risen Indeed! Alleluia to that for sure!

With all of this Easter talk I also think that it is fair enough to say that each and every day we typically come to the very realization that God did all of the work for us when he went to the cross, and when he rose from the grave. He took the very weight off of our shoulders that we could have easily had to carry throughout our lives. He did not let us carry dead weight around with us, and he did not demand that we carry our burdens around with us like some badge of honor or something. In today’s Gospel Reading we get reminded of the blessing of the process of pruning. We come to the realization that we have to cut back at times or let things go, and for that very fact we realize that we can and even have to bring things to the Lord. Pruning is not easy, and I am sure it is not something many of us even think of all too often unless of course we are thinking of gardening. Furthermore, pruning is not actually easy unless you really are willing to cut things down to their bare elements at times to allow them to grow and flourish. We are not comfortable with that when it comes to plants, and we are definitely not comfortable with that when it comes to ourselves at times. We hear about this very discomfort in one of the many stories I happened to read during my research for today’s Sermon. So, let me share that story with you, and let’s see what you might get out of it.

There is a story about… “someone who had bought a tree from a nursery. Part of the service included the delivery and planting of the tree they’d purchased. The delivery day came and the man from the nursery arrived with the tree. He dug the hole in the yard and planted the young tree. Before he left, he asked the new tree owner, “Would you like me to prune the tree for you?” The owner said, “Sure, thanks.” So, then the tree man started pruning. And he really went at it! The new owner’s eyes began to bulge and he started to get increasingly nervous as he watched limb after limb come down. Finally, the tree guy stopped cutting. The owner looked at his poor tree. It looked pathetic, a shadow of its former self. The tree guy looked over at the owner and said, “Yeah, I took a lot off. I always ask people if they want me to prune their tree before I leave. You need to cut back on them when they’re transplanted. And as the new owner, you don’t have the heart to cut away what needs to go.”” (4)

This comes to the very fact and questions that “If we were to be pruned today, what would be cut off? What looks good in our lives but does nothing to contribute to our ability or willingness to love? What are the basic essentials of our lives that help us to love and what gets in the way? Our basic needs are food, shelter, clothing and transportation. Once those are achieved, we have all we need. The rest is foliage that either contributes to our ability to love or is fair game for the pruner’s knife. If we were pruned today, what would go and what would stay? Jesus makes it clear that the measure is love. Anything that helps us love God and others will stay, and all that detracts from our love for others can go.” (3)

Unfortunately, “The pruning process often hurts in our lives too. God may take something away that we really cherish like our athleticism or a nice house. He does that because we have perhaps become too attached to these things and it’s hurting our connection to the vine, (which is) Jesus. He’s not punishing you when he prunes. On the contrary, he’s showing just how much he loves you because he really wants you to have life to the full as he defines it. Whatever the pain you’re undergoing now, trust that as a master gardener your heavenly Father has not lopped off more than he should. He’s never going to cut away from you that which you need to stay connected to Jesus. And that’s what it’s all about: staying connected to Jesus. For without Jesus, we don’t have life. We’re broken, withering branches that are bound for the fire. That’s not what God wants for us.” (5)

This is also where that choice and commitment come in that I spoke of earlier as well as “We gather to worship to taste and see the vine. We gather to make confession of ways in which we have lived contrary to the life in the vine and we hear words of forgiveness. We gather to open ourselves to the pruning that God would do in our lives. We organize ourselves so that we can live out the fruit of love to those within and outside of these walls. We commit ourselves to the life of this congregation because without it, a lot of foliage can develop which has nothing to do with the fruit we are created to produce. We hear the word of God in scripture, hymns and preaching and we discern the parts of our lives that need to change.” (3)

So, you may be sitting there thinking to yourself or asking… “Who is eligible to be part of the true vine, to receive the love of Jesus? Everyone and anyone! The followers of Jesus, the ones who travelled and had fellowship with him were no different than us. They were a mixed bunch. There were some who were educated, others uneducated, poor and rich, fishermen, tax collectors, carpenters, farmers, sick and healed people, hungry and fed people, criminals, and sinners of every kind. They were all a part, a branch of Jesus the true vine.” (6)

“When we listen to the Word of God, to the words of Jesus we are like the disciples. We are in fellowship with Jesus, the true vine. Every time we listen to the Word of God, either from the Bible, on radio, from a friend or stranger, at church, or wherever and whenever, God is busy caring for us and gently pruning away the dead wood, and often while we are unaware. Jesus continuously calls us to abide in him, which means to feed on the Word of God. In this way Jesus can abide in us, and we become part of the true vine. The Word of God makes us clean and ready for new growth and abundant fruit.” (6)

So, let’s keep our commitment up through our choice to grow with and through one another, let us allow ourselves to be pruned whether we really want to or not so that we can gorw, and let us abide in him so that he can continue to abide in us. We need to stay connected to the vine so that we can experience growth and change through this Easter season and far beyond. For we remember that apart from God we can do nothing.

Amen.

**References**

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 Preaching

 Year B 2024

 April 28th, 2024

 Fifth Sunday of Easter

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(3) SermonCentral.com

 5 Easter B

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 Scripture: John 15:1-8

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 Connected To The Vine

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 Stay Connected To Jesus

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 Father, Son, & Disciple

 Contributed by Martin Ellgar on Dec 19, 2014

 Scripture: John 15:1-8

 Denomination: Lutheran

**John 15:1-8**

 On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they

 would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart

 from him, they can do nothing.

 [Jesus said:] 1“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.”