

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
April 29, 2018, The Fifth Sunday of Lent
 Psalm 22:25-31, John 15:1-8

ATTACHED

“I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower...I am the vine, you are the branches.”
--John 15:1, 5

This morning I'm bringing you a new vocabulary word I learned this week while listening to a podcast about "Social Media and Screen Addiction."

The word is "propinquity."

(Dr. Adam Alter, Calm App Masterclass, "Social Media and Screen Addiction",
 Assoc. Professor of Psychology and Marketing, New York University,
 Author of "Irresistible, the Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked")

It turns out there is a "concept in psychology known as propinquity, and this is an old term that basically suggests that the things that are closest to you in physical space have the biggest effect on your psychological experience of the world." **Whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world.**

In this podcast Dr. Adam Alter, a professor and author from New York University, was talking about how adults and teens and young adults use their smart phones. He is a specialist in the field of "Screen Addiction."

Now I know that for some of you this talk of phones is not really a part of your life, either because you are of an age when you don't feel the need for a smart phone, or you are of an age that your parents are ruining your lives by not letting you have a phone of your own! Which is a discussion for another time.

But, speaking of the vast majority of American adults that use smart phones, studies have shown that most adults are now on their phones 3 to 4 hours a day. For teenagers it is somewhere between 5 to 9 hours a day.

The professor has found that while our phones are not "implanted in our bodies, they may as well be. 75% of adults in America are able to reach their phones without moving their feet, 24 hours a day...no matter where they are, their phone is within reach at all times.

The phone is always right there: awake, in bed, wherever you are, you don't have to go get up and walk to get your phone, it's right there.

This is where propinquity comes in. **Whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world.** "So things that are with you 24 hours a day, like your phone, will have a much bigger effect on you than things that are far away."

It is safe to say that many of us in this Sanctuary are in close propinquity to our phones most of the time.

Now if Jesus had come to earth today, instead of 2,000 years ago maybe he would have talked about propinquity in the passage we read this morning from John 15. But somehow Jesus saying "I want to be in close propinquity with you, I want to be so close to you that I affect your understanding of the world, just doesn't have the same ring to it as "I am the vine and you are the branches."

We may not be surrounded by grape vines, but we can know what Jesus meant when he said: "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (v. 5)

I learned this week that the best grapes grow closest to the vine, so the farmer caring for the vines keeps the trailing vines cut back.

Grapes are not allowed to grow the first few years so the vines can become completely established. From the beginning the vines are pruned and kept short. Once they've matured enough to grow grapes, the vines are still pruned and kept in check. Pruning is part of growth.

If a vine, or part of a vine, isn't growing grapes it is cut out so that the plants energy can go into good growth. Whatever is cut away is just burned, because it no longer has any use.

Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol III

Jesus spoke these words in John 15 near the end of his life, before the Last Supper. He was teaching his disciples then, and us here this morning, how important it is that we stay close to him.

Whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world.

Jesus wants us to be in close propinquity to him, he wants us to live our lives so close to him that it shapes our understanding of our world.

Jesus wants to be closer to us than even our phones.

Jesus wants us to be so close that God can shape us into the people we're called to be.

This week as I thought about this passage I listened to the "Pray as You Go" App that I've talked to you about in the newsletter and in sermons. (Reading for April 28-29)

The devotion on John 15 was asking us to pay attention to the way the God the Vine Grower carefully tends and prunes the vine.

Now I must confess that the sound of being pruned by God has never been a comfortable thought to me. Change is never easy.

But in the words of this devotion, in John 15: "notice how Jesus keeps repeating how carefully the vine is treated in order that it will be fruitful, how he tells us again and again that being closely grafted into the true vine, abiding in him, enables us to be fruitful."

The pruning and shaping God does in our lives is done in love.

We are each God's beloved child, and God's love is there to shape and prune and create us into who God has made us to be.

And for that to happen we need to be connected to the Vine.

Whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world.

Jesus reminded his followers and reminds us that God is the Vine Grower. It is God who grows us into people of faith. Jesus is the true vine and we are the ones who grow from the vine. Sometimes our growth will take pruning, sometimes it will take cutting away dead wood. Sometimes it takes removing the creeping vines in our lives so that there can be good growth in our lives.

Pruning is part of growth, and it's done in love.

So then our job is to cling to the vine, to stay attached, and abide with Jesus. Our journey of faith is to choose propinquity with Jesus, so that God the Vine Grower can shape our understanding of life.

Because **whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world**, I believe this passage from John asks several questions of us this morning:

The first is, do you feel connected to the Jesus the true vine in all of your life?

Is there a place where you have disconnected yourself from God?
Or has something happened in your life that has disconnected you from God?

If there is a place where you feel disconnected from the true vine,
How can God help you know that you are connected to Jesus?
Can you let yourself ask God for that help?

Today is the day to ask yourself:
What do I need to do to invite God to help me reconnect?
Is there someone who can help you reconnect?

Do you need your pastor, or a friend, or a counselor to listen to your story
of feeling disconnected?

Do you need your pastor or a friend or family member to pray for you and
with you in this place of disconnection?

What changes need to happen in your life for you to reconnect to Jesus the Vine?
Can you ask God to help you with that today?

We are called to remember that God the loving Vine Grower will not give up on us.

You will never be pruned away from Jesus the true vine. Nothing can separate us from the
love of God. (Romans 8)

God's plan is for each of us to be connected to God's love because **whatever is closest to us, shapes the way we see the world.**

Other questions this passage asks us have to do with those places in our lives that may feel
withered, or lifeless, or filled with dead wood, or going in the wrong direction like the creeping trailer
vines.

If we imagine ourselves as one of the branches connected to Jesus the true vine, are there
places where we aren't letting God the Vine Grower do the pruning that needs to be done?

Today, can we let ourselves see the places where true life and living just aren't happening
because we are holding tightly to an old way of living and being?

Can we let ourselves see the places where we have creeper vines that are draining energy
from our lives because they are pulling us in directions we don't need to go?

Can we see the dry and dusty places in our lives that aren't bearing fruit, and probably never will, but
we keep holding on tightly to the familiar?

Can we step out of the way today so that God can lovingly prune those places in our lives that
need pruning?

Can we trust God the Vine Grower, that now is the time in our life of faith for the change that
pruning will bring?

God's pruning is done in love.

God's pruning is done so that true growth and living can happen in our lives, so that we can abide in,
and be connected to, Jesus.

Which brings us to a final question. What or who is in closest propinquity in your life?

What or who is closest to you, shaping the way you see the world?

Listen a final time to Jesus' words in John 15, as being just for you this morning.
I'll be reading from the Message Translation:

Jesus says to you:

1 "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. **2** He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. **3** You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. **4** "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. **5** "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. **6** Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. **7** But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. **8** This is how my Father shows who he is - when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

Propinquity!