

“RESURRECTION LOVE”

I John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

April 28, 2024

If this were a Bible Study instead of a sermon, I'd have to begin with the features of the text that I don't like. If the branches represent people, I'm a little uncomfortable lopping them off. I'm more disturbed by these branches being tossed in the fire. Other than that, this metaphor that describes the relationship between Jesus and his disciples works. We're followers, deriving our strength from Jesus. As long as we're listening to him, we're bearing fruit.

There are some who equate the fire with the fires of hell. Don't go there. This is not a story about dead wood. It's about a healthy vineyard, about the living branches. We are not responsible for the dead ones. That's the job of the vinedresser, God.

So, since this is a sermon, I begin with the most important thing to remember when reading John's gospel: the Jesus we encounter there is the risen Christ, not the one stirring up controversy as he marches toward the cross. John's Jesus serves up the wine for the wedding feast, speaks about living water, preaches about being born again, opens the eyes of the blind, multiplies the loaves. Jesus is alive, from beginning to end! That's why this text is included in the Easter season.

So, instead of talking about dead wood, let's talk about the living vine, its branches, and its fruit. Having lived with a large vineyard essentially in the backyard, I can tell you that the aroma of a vineyard when the grapes are in is amazing. It started with pruning the branches back to the main vine. The healthy branch that will bear much fruit begins by staying close to the vine.

“Abide in me,” says the living Christ. This is the key to bearing fruit. And the key to abiding is love. Verse 9, which we did not read, says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” Don't be distracted by the dead wood. After the harvest, most of those branches on which the fruit grew, will be cut away in preparation for the next harvest. What will be left through the winter are some very short branches abiding in the living vine, abiding in the love of the risen Christ.

I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. The life of faith is all about love, about living in love, about a love that keeps coming back, about a resurrection love. Our first reading from First John knows all about this resurrection love. Probably not the same author as the gospel, but certainly familiar with the Gospel. He's clearly interested in the Jesus who is alive. For him, it's love that brings life. It's all about love, about the love of God, a love we discover in the person of Jesus, a love whose fruit is loving others. The love of Jesus is demonstrated in our love for each other.

It's simple: God loves the world, enters in the person of Jesus, who shows us what love looks like and invites us to live lives of love. Don't be afraid. Love casts out fear. Fear tears us down. Fear sets us against each other. Fear distracts us from what God wants

us to do. Let go of the fires. Let go of the dead wood. Let go of the fires of hell. Let go of judgment.

This is not to say that the world is not complicated, that there aren't things to fear, but if you want to work your way through it, love your brothers and sisters. Love raises us to new life.

It's love that moves us to feed the hungry, love that leads to peace, love that welcomes the stranger, love that feeds the courage to make sacrifices for another.

And it's love we must return to when our work is done. When the vineyard is filled with the aromas of ripe fruit, and the harvest is plentiful, it's love we must return to for the next task. There is always a need for love, especially in a world torn apart by fear. For those who have known the love of God, there is always love to return to when the demands of life have worn you out, when justice seems far away, when greed seems to carry the day.

Go back to the vine, back to the love of God, of Jesus, a love that endures the winter, blossoms in the spring and bears much fruit in the fall. It's not quite harvest time, but love is rising, always rising. Love is always a resurrection love. The vineyard is coming to life. Take a deep breath. It won't be long before the sweet smell of grapes fill the air. Amen.