

Lent 2

Text: John 15:1-17

*"Reconciliation and God's Glory"*

In Jesus, we see the deep desire of God for reconciliation with His fallen human creatures – for renewed fellowship between God and man. Where Paul often describes our salvation in legal terms like “justification” and “propitiation”, John speaks in language that evokes personal relationships. Relationships between God and people. His first letter opens with this statement of purpose: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* (1 John 1:1-3) In Jesus’ High Priestly prayer recorded by John, we hear Jesus speak of eternal life in very personal terms: *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* (John 17:3) Like the father of Jesus’ lost son story, God bids His lost children to come home and to live with Him together in peace.

Today’s reading from John 15 provides us with an earthy picture of believing and living with God and with each other in peace. Just hours before Jesus would be arrested and taken from those who followed Him, He used a metaphor to assure them of the durability of their relationship with Him. *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* It is as if the Lord said to them, “Do not be troubled, my friends. Though we will be apart for a time, that time will be short, for you and I are one.”

At the moment when the disciples were most anxious about losing their Master, He directed their attention to their need to maintain trust with Him. *“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”* “Remember and rely on what I have told you; hang on to it, and like branches growing from a vine, your lives will be shaped in ways that honor our Father.”

Jesus is true and trustworthy. He died on the cross to knock down the sin-mortared wall that stood between us and God. He rose from the dead on the third day to lead us into God’s presence as forgiven and beloved children. We are one with Him; He loves us and we love Him in return. He is the vine, and we are branches growing from Him. Our new life, our true life comes from Him. He speaks His living words to us; we hear them and respond to them with repentance, faith and loving obedience, bearing fruit that glorifies our Father, the vinedresser.

The fruit we bear by abiding in Jesus glistens with colors of love and concern for other people. *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* God loves the whole world and gave His Son for all. God made peace with all people, and those of us who know that peace through Jesus, are chosen and sent to live at peace with others and to proclaim that peace to them in Jesus’ name. *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”*

*“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* Jesus’ disciples found their faith in these words tested as soon as Jesus was arrested. Many other tests face those who believe in the Lord. Conflict with people is one. There are ways of responding to conflict that seem right to us, but they all end in broken or estranged relationships, instead of the Spirit’s fruit called love. Whenever our goals or desires clash with those held by other people, we find ourselves drawn into conflict with them, and though Jesus bids us to abide in Him and His words then, we often turn to strategies that make sense to us, that seem most likely to get us what we want, and we behave like branches broken from the vine.

Some of us turn to behaviors aimed at bending the will of the other person to our own. We attack, criticize, slander and even threaten our opponents to bring them around to our way of thinking. The emotion that drives us through conflict is anger. We view those with whom we conflict not as neighbors to be loved, but as competitors to be defeated or as obstacles to be cleared from our path.

Or we may adopt responses intended to protect us from the pain of being in conflict with others. We sidestep or try to minimize or ignore problems with others. We avoid meetings, we adopt a code of silence, we put on the appearance of all being well with others. Conflicts frighten us, and instead of seeing people as neighbors to love, we count them as threats to be avoided, and dangers to be averted.

But Jesus insists, *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* And He calls, *“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples... These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”* There is a way for us to respond to conflicts that is true to our relationship with Jesus and one another. It is the way of reconciliation, forgiveness and love. Instead of fighting or fleeing those with whom we conflict, we trust in the love God the Father has shown us through His Son because that love has brought us home to Him. If God was able to make us to be at peace with Him through the grace of Jesus, then He is also able by His Spirit to help us to seek peace with others. *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

When we seek peace in the midst of our conflicts with others, we give witness to the good news that Jesus is this world’s Prince of Peace. We exercise faith in God’s forgiveness

by humbly confessing our sins to each other rather than defending ourselves and blaming others. We do the same when we forgive each other, and commit ourselves to serving and helping each other. We do these things only with the help of Jesus and His Spirit, for He is the vine and we are His branches. We abide in Him. Seeking peace in conflicts yields good fruit, fruit that gives glory to our Father, demonstrating His goodness and mercy in our lives.

So we give thanks to God for His peace, and we praise Jesus for He is our peace. What a blessing to be in fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and what comfort to know we live in and through Jesus. He is the vine and we are His branches. God is so good to us, and it is so good to know Him and to honor Him by following Jesus' command of love. May God renew His people in faith and love that we may live in peace with our neighbors. To Him be the glory. Amen.