

Attachment

“Jesus is our source of life.”

John 15:1-11

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The Real Vine

Early spring (it's not too soon to think of that), just after the chance of severe cold has passed and just when there is an awakening of life. A budded twig kept moist through the winter, is sliced clean with a sharp knife and inserted into a cut made in hearty native rootstock. Heartwood makes contact with heartwood as the fresh cuts are sealed with grafting wax. The air warms and buds, on a once-foreign branch, begin to open. Life-giving juices run through the veins as the branch takes on a woody nature. The buds open and the leaves sprout. Blooms burst forth...and they yield an abundance of fruit.

One is the vine. The other is the branch. And between them is life.

The secret is good root stock. There are all kinds of fancy European grapes suitable for eating or crushing to make juices and wine. But plant them on their own in this soil and some kind of blight is bound to wipe them out fast. But graft them into the stock of a wild American variety: then you have a grape that is able to thrive in this climate. The secret is in the rootstock.

Jesus was about done with his ministry. He and his friends had walked the roads of Palestine together. They'd shared everything: preaching on the hillsides; teaching under trees and in the Temple; breaking bread and sometimes gleaning wheat in the fields to keep from going hungry; caring for people and healing them; arguing with the mucky-mucks who tried to stop what they were doing. Now it's about over and Jesus is about done with what he has to say when he mentions almost as an after-thought:

“You know, I AM.” It was a God-moment. I AM the true vine and God is the vine-grower”...and he talks of the necessity for branches to bear fruit. And he carries it to the point you might want to decide that it all sounds a little too threatening, until he says, “LIVE in me as I live in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it lives in the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you live in me. I AM the vine, you are the

branches. Those who live in me bear much fruit, without me you can't do anything...you just wither and die.”

Heartwood touching heartwood: one is the vine. The other the branch...and between them is life.

Real Fruit

So what does that mean? Does it mean your heartwood touching Jesus' heartwood just makes a difference about what happens to you after you die? Or does it mean that it will make a difference in your day-to-day living? Or does it also mean that Jesus wants your attachment to him to make a difference in the world?

One wonders.

I am the vine and you are the branches. This is who Jesus is. One day Jesus was leaving Jericho with a large crowd of people with his disciples and him. There, along the road was a man who was begging because he was blind. His name was Bartimaeus. It seems the writer of the gospel wants you to know right off that he wasn't just a nuisance. He had a name. And he had parents. He was the son of someone called Timaeus.

But just the same, he was one of those beggars who aren't content to sit with a cup and a sign quietly hoping that someone will notice and feel sorry enough to give. In fact, he was going to do more than play a saxophone with an open case, imposing a performance to call forth a donation. From the sounds of it he was like one of those beggars who have the capacity to get right in your face and make it sound like it's all about him. He' was shouting it: "Have mercy on me."

Yet, he had a name. He had parents. He wasn't a nuisance. In fact the things that he shouted between his cry for help were bold claims: *Jesus Son of David* – in other words, King!

Other people treated him as though he was just a nuisance, someone they wouldn't want to be attached to; and someone they didn't think someone like Jesus should be attached to. They told him to bug off.

But this is who Jesus is. He stopped. And he called for Bartimaeus to come to him. Then he asked Bartimaeus what he could do; and that's when Bartimaeus asked to see again. This is when Bartimaeus was grafted onto Jesus, really attached. Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." That's when Bartimaeus regained his sight.

The budded twig sliced clean, grafted into the life-giving vine: it was not all about Bartimaeus after all. This is not only when he regained his sight, it is also when he started following. Attached, he followed and started bearing fruit.¹

Attachment to Jesus is something more than *you receiving*. It's having Jesus' spirit flow through your veins so that you can bear the kind of fruit that Jesus bore.

"I AM the vine." The God moment between Jesus and his disciples when he said this took place at the brink. He was about to say a few more words to them, pray a long prayer and then lead them to the garden where he'd be arrested and before they knew it he would be crucified. He was on the brink and he knew it; and I don't think at all that he was mincing words.

"I AM the vine. You are the branches. ***IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL THAT YOU GET THIS RIGHT.*** Live in me as I live in you." In other words, live out a faith that makes such a difference that it fills you with a life you wouldn't otherwise have...and I will live through you to ***TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.***

Some people spend their lives collecting good ideas. Others spend their lives living them out.

Jesus is not just a good idea. He is not just a hero. He's more than a poetic ideal. The Gospel of John lays it out again and again: He's the Son of the Living God, the Word of God made flesh and – to those who believe – he is the Resurrection and Life. Attach yourself so that heartwood touches heartwood and you have life that bears the kind of fruit that redeems the world.

Jesus is not just to be observed. He is for holding onto, the vine to be grafted into. There's no telling what can happen when you take hold of Christ and mean it. It will change you. It can change a church. It will change a world.

What happens when the branch receives its life from the vine? What happens when a people have faith rather than talk about it? What happens when they give transformationally rather than begrudgingly? What happens when people change from saying, "It should be done" to saying, "Let's do it?"

Lives become focused. Prayer becomes a way of life instead of a time to put life on hold. People are drawn to others: not just those who are like them, but those who are most in need. People insist on justice and work for it. They find themselves with spiritual resources to cope with calamities in their lives. And Christ's followers get so caught up in the mission at hand that usually resources are not an issue. They simply find a way. And they don't notice the sacrifice because they have so much fun living the life and bearing the fruit.

Real Joy

Yesterday I saw something incredible with my own eyes. A group of about 50 people from our church ranging in age from children to senior adults spent the morning at World Medical Relief packing boxes with supplies that have been donated by area hospitals and physicians.

You might not think that they were doing anything very significant. A lot of it was tedious work: taking donated medical supplies and sorting them and counting them, then packing them tight in big boxes set on pallets to be stacked in a shipping carton and sent away. Syringes and bandages, medicines and crutches: a hundred hands packing and recording and sending them off. Good busy-work.

But these supplies are bound for Haiti, intended to care for the poorest of poor in one of the worst disasters any of us will ever see in our lifetime. We're currently trying to make the right connections with the United Methodist Committee on Relief so that UMCOR can receive them and then distribute that which will save lives and mend them.

George Samson is a member of our church and is the President and CEO of World Medical Relief. When the morning's work was done, George told us the story of the mission and explained how important volunteer work is in the scheme of things.

After he finished, I told the group what I want to share with you. "It might seem like what was accomplished was a good thing, but small. Yet, look at your hands. How many bandages did your hands pack? How many vials of medicine and how many

sutures? Do you even know? Yet each item you packed will find its way to someone in great need. It might even be someone you've seen on the news: someone living in the devastation. What you packed may save their life. It may be an important part of their healing.

“Look at your hands. These are also Jesus' hands. What you have done today is a work of God's love.”

At the same time all that was going on, more of our church members were here in the church caring for some of God's children who are currently without a home through a Saturday program we call *SOSOS – South Oakland Shelter on Saturday*.

Your hands which are also Jesus' hands doing the work of God's love.

Branches attached to the vine – grafted in to bear fruit. Heartwood touching heartwood. The flow of life arises from the root stock through the branches, bursting forth in fruits of love, life, and joy. And Jesus said, “I have said these things so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Mother Theresa said it another way: “Small things done with great love will change the world.”

Changing the world as those attached to Jesus has simply got to be a blast.

¹ Mark 10:46-52