

5th Sunday of Easter
For Group Meetings from April 21st – April 27th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER

Share: How did last week's scripture (John 10:10-18) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: John 15:1-8

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. In the picture Jesus describes in verses 1-3, what does each element – vine, gardener, branches, fruit – represent?
2. What happens to branches that decide to “go it alone”?
3. What does a person of faith look like according to this text?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What needs to be pruned in your life, work, community?
2. Who or what in your life do you feel you cannot be separated from?
3. What does it mean for you to abide in Jesus?

Memorize this verse: “I 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.” (John 15:5) Where have you seen fruit ripening recently?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 22:25-31. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

At any given moment, even when things are going relatively well, there are still so many difficult things with which to contend in this life and it often feels like being pruned. Or maybe it doesn't. Maybe it just feels like being cut, cut down by life's tragedies great or small, cut down by disappointment or despair, cut down by illness or job loss or other circumstances beyond our control and left to wither and die.

It's easy to read this passage as one of judgment and threat. But I think the thrust of the passage is promise. Why? It all has to do with context. First, the context of this text: Jesus is offering these words to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. He knows what is going to happen – both to himself and to his closest friends – and they do not. They are about to be cut down by his crucifixion and death and he is assuring them that it will not be mere, senseless cutting but that they will survive, even flourish. The second context is that of the community for which John writes. Because by the time they hear these words they have already been scattered, likely thrown out of their synagogue, and have had plenty of reason to feel like they've been abandoned. But John writes to assure them that while they have indeed been cut, it is the pruning for more abundant fruit and life.

No doubt that was hard to believe, as there was precious little evidence available to the disciples or John's community that they had not been abandoned. And no doubt it still is hard to believe on our end as well, as so much of life simply tears at us with no evidence that it is toward some more fruitful future. But amid this uncertainty and distress, Jesus still promises us that he will not abandon us but rather will cling to us like a vine clings to a tree so that we endure, persevere, and even flourish among these present difficulties.

Here's the thing: if Jesus had only said, "abide in me or else," that would be a different matter. But it's not. "Abide in me," Jesus says, "as I abide in you." This is more than good advice. More than an invitation. This is a promise, that no matter what happens, Jesus will be with us. That no matter what happens, Jesus will hold onto us. And that no matter what happens, God in Jesus will bring all things to a good end. Which is not to say, by the way, that everything happens for a reason. Rather, it is to say that no matter what happens, we have God's promise in Jesus to work for good. Keep in mind that these words are said just before Jesus goes to the cross. And I would argue that the cross was not simply a part of some larger plan, but rather the chief example of God's commitment to wrestle life and hope from the very place that seems most devoid of life and hope.

This can be a hard life to live, and at times it's helpful to hear once again that the suffering we endure is not wasteful cutting but pruning for a more abundant future and, that no matter what happens, Jesus will not abandon us.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen