

6/11/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

GOOD MORNING – AND WELCOME!

As you can see, we had a stellar week of Bible School, topped off with a program on Friday evening that was out-of-this-world as we heard from the children some of what they learned about shining Jesus' light. We'll hear some more about that and also about the Camp 412 weekend in a few minutes. We'll also continue in our seeking peace theme.

What would you like to share with one another this morning?

- **Glen Ediger** will join us on Friday for Sr. Coffee – he'll tell us about threshing stones.
- **For the month of July**, children ages 3 years through High school will meet all together for Sunday school to have a sort of inter-generational time. Along with at least two adults, our high school and jr hi students have agreed to spend this time interacting with the younger children. I'm impressed with and grateful to our HS and JH students and their willingness to be involved in this way – some of them are even excited about it! An email will be sent out this week with more details...

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: We have come to meditate on the word of God,

People: that we might be like trees planted by streams of water.

Leader: We have come to listen to the words of Jesus.

People: that we might be branches abiding in the true vine.

Leader: Let us delight in this time of worship

People: that our joy might be complete.

Open our ears and our hearts, God so that we're able to drink deeply of your wisdom, to hear and understand clearly your longing for connection to us and all creation.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

The heavens are telling your glory, God. The sunshine in the morning after having rain in the night makes everything glisten and grow, reminding us of your goodness. The banks of storm clouds and the powerful winds remind us of your creativity. The rhythm of the seasons, passing from one to the next remind us of your steadfastness. And we are grateful.

We thank you God for all the goodness that happened in last week's Bible school. Thank you for the students and their families, the helpers, the teachers, the directors and everyone who pitched in to move the program from the park here to the church to make the program happen beautifully – in spite of the rain on Friday. Thank you for all that was learned about you, God and about Jesus and how to reflect his love and light into the world. Thank you for the goodness that happened two weekends ago at Camp 412 for the Jr Hi students, the counselors and directors of that important experience. May your Spirit continue to move in all of these children's lives in ways that lead them toward you and teach them to follow Jesus.

We pray for Gage Maley and Celia Peters and all the children who will be attending Camp Mennoscah this week as well as for Timothy and Jacob and the rest of the staff. We ask

for safety and fun and for the guidance of your Holy Spirit in this opportunity to learn more about your love and what it means to walk in the ways of Jesus.

O God, we thank you for those who have given thoughtful consideration to taking the step of faith to be baptized next Sunday. We pray for Cambry, Emma, Mallory, Javin and Noah as they make their faith statements and share their commitments with the church.

We pray for those who are raising children – here in this congregation and everywhere. It can sometimes feel like there are challenges and difficulties that previous generations have never had to deal with before... and while that may be true, help us to remember the constancy of your love, the promise of your presence, the gift that is each child. We ask for your patience, wisdom and guidance for parents and for all of us as we tend to the needs of the children and one another.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

6TH GRADE SHARING – PASTOR CALEB

Over the past number of years, I've had the privilege of being involved with the 6th grade VBS groups.

We had six 6th grade students participating in our VBS, and we joined up with the 6th grade group from Tabor church, bringing our total to 15 kids. This was a good group of kids. There was plenty of chatter, but they listened very well.

Our theme for the week was letting the light of Christ shine through acts of service. We went a number of different places for service projects.

We began each day joining the opening at Tabor church. On Monday we went to the MCC Center in North Newton, where we received a brief tour and then were involved in making school kits and hygiene kits and folding comforters.

Tuesday we went to Bethesda home, keeping some of the residents company as we played board games with them.

Wednesday, we went to the Etc. Shop in Newton. There we received a good tour and were involved in cleaning and sidewalk art at the entrance.

Thursday was our last day as a joint group. We went to the MDS cabinet shop in Goessel. There the tasks including staining, screwing face plates together, sanding, creating screw holes, and wrapping finished cabinets in plastic wrap. The kids especially enjoyed the cabinet shop, and one can't help but be impressed by the excellent tools and organization they have there to efficiently produce cabinets.

Friday, our group was here at the church – we spent time creating artwork about the week, listened in on the Bible story, and transported risers to the Goessel park where the program was going to take place if it hadn't been for rain. Again, it was a good week, and a meaningful way for them to complete their Bible School experience.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Generous God, we bring to you a portion of what you have given us. We share from our abundant harvests and may all that we offer serve your reign of peace. May these offerings bear fruit in our lives and in our world. Amen.

CONNECTED TO THE SOURCE

John 15:1-17

At our house, there is a lattice over our patio and a vine that is intended to grow over the lattice for shade. The vine struggled a little with a dry winter and I discovered this spring that much of the vine on top of the lattice was dead.

So I spent time up there removing all of the dead branches and shoots. Many were obviously dead – if it was dry and simply cracked off, that’s a good sign.

Sometimes it was very hard to tell. A few branches that seemed to be dead actually were sprouting leaves in some spot. Plus, the branches were intertwined in a way that it can be really hard to tell. I removed some branches that I might have chosen to leave, and left some that I might have taken away.

To state the obvious, if you cut a branch, even if there is life in it, it’s not going to stay alive for long once it is cut off from the main vine. Still, the vine does look much cleaner (and smaller), and the lattice is also in better shape with Tim Goertzen’s help repairing parts of it.

In John 15, Jesus is offering his final words to his disciples before he will be arrested later that night and crucified the next day.

Seven different times in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes statements beginning with “I am.” I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the gate; I am the good shepherd; I am the resurrection; I am the way; and finally this one: “I am the true vine.”

In this image, Jesus talks about the relationship between himself and his followers as like that between a primary vine, and its many branches.

The vine that Jesus is talking about is a grapevine, which was a major part of agriculture in Jesus’ world, and a frequent theme in scripture.

Just as I attempted to clean the vine at our house, Jesus describes the process of pruning or “cleaning” a vine. It is interesting to note that the words for “removing” dead branches, “pruning” branches that bear fruit, and becoming “clean” through Jesus’ teaching are all part of the same word family.

Jesus is not interested in disciples who simply try to be good people or seek inspiration from his teachings. What we have here is an image of abiding spiritual connection with Christ, who is the source of our peace.

Over these weeks, we are talking about seeking peace – peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with others, and peace with creation.

In the metaphor of Jesus, the branches bear fruit when they are connected to the vine. Peace is the fruit that comes with staying spiritually grounded in the vine that is Christ.

So what does it mean to be connected to the vine in this metaphor of Jesus? I think about the various motivations that any of us can have for what we do in our lives.

Sometimes we can be motivated by guilt or **shame**. Whether it is our upbringing or strong messages that we have received, we feel that we “should” be a certain way or do certain things. Often the driving motivation that we may not even be aware of is the thought that “I’m not enough.” “I am not worthy.” “I don’t matter *unless...*” – fill in the blank.

While many of us, myself included, have gotten by with a shame-based motivation, it is not healthy or sustainable. Jesus speaks not of shame, but of “remaining in his love.” Jesus points to a motivation based on love.

Another motivation that many of us feel for how we go about life is **obligation** or duty. Previous generations would have spoken of duty as a virtue. I might call this “positive shame,” and it is certainly healthier than negative shame.

There is no way in life to avoid sometimes doing things out of a sense of obligation or responsibility. You may not always enjoy it, but you need to follow through.

Obligation is social motivation that allows a family, organization, subculture, or economy to function. This is a step in a better direction, but still not what the image of the vine and branches speaks of.

Another driving motivation for many people is **anger**, particularly if you have been a victim or survivor of injustice or are an ally of people who have been oppressed in some way. Anger is not always a bad thing when it is channeled in a healthy way toward seeking to create positive shame.

Whether it is civil rights, advocacy for immigrants, advocacy for the poor, advocacy for survivors of sexual violence, or climate justice, a certain indignation and outrage at the status quo inspires bold action.

We live in a world where there is plenty to be angry about. But there is a danger or shadow-side to allowing anger to be a primary driver of one’s vocation. Anger may cause us to demonize anyone or anything we perceive as standing in the way of our cause.

Movements for justice are healthier, more sustainable, and more transformative when they have taproots into spiritual grounding – and this what I believe Jesus is talking about with the image of the vine and branches.

There’s one more motivation that I want to mention. We often talk about the things we are “passionate” about. **Passion** can be an important driving force for how we go about our lives.

It is true that ancient writers spoke of “the passions” as a bad thing. By that word, they meant what we might today call “emotional reactivity” or our “inner demons.”

Like many words, the meaning of the word “passion” has evolved, and today we use it to talk about things that excite us or bring us joy. Most of the time, someone living out their passions is a good and healthy thing.

But even here there can be a shadow-side. Our passions come from our inner self, as opposed to a spiritual source outside of ourselves. At times we delude ourselves into thinking we are just seeking to help, when we may be more serving our desires and needs to feel significant.

When I did a summer unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, we often asked ourselves the question, “who’s needs are being met, those of the patient, or my own needs?” When we stay connected to the vine who is Christ, we have a deeper and loving foundation for all that we are and do.

How do we stay connected to the vine?

I don't believe this is a matter of holding fast to good doctrine. Nor are there formulaic set of practices that one must do, such as read a certain amount of the Bible or pray in a certain way.

Our Anabaptist tradition, more than some other Christian traditions, emphasizes **community** as well as the pursuit of an **ethical** life. I deeply value both community as well as ethics -- taking the teachings of Jesus seriously.

Yet community often holds together simply by the sense of obligation or positive shame governed by the subculture of our community, rather than necessarily being the community of people who are deeply spiritually grounded.

We can also pursue more or less ethical lives that are fueled by shame, guilt, obligation, anger, or passion. “Remain in me,” says Jesus. Other translations say “abide.” This word often means to stay as a guest in the house of a host.

Stay here. Linger here.

This is language of mystical union. Clearly, maintaining a mystical connection with Christ was important to the Gospel writer as well as the community that received this Gospel.

In verse 7, Jesus promises, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

These are hard words, because they seem difficult to reconcile in the face of tragedy and grief that sometimes come in spite of our prayers. What is promised and what is not promised?

Surely the promise is not for a particular outcome in the face of a challenge or tragedy. One way to understand this, is that spiritual connection with Christ, being grounded in the source, gives us more resilience in the face of challenge.

It’s also helpful to remember that the “you” of Jesus’ words are plural. This is a promise given to the corporate body of disciples, not to the individual.

Ideally, this is a community that prays together and that carries one another’s burdens, in a way that they become lighter.

Jesus also speaks of friendship. He says, “I no longer call you servants... instead, I have called you friends.” A friend is someone who shows kindness and love. There is an intimate connection, and in the context of Jesus' day there would be a sense of being a social equal, which a servant or slave definitely is not.

In the context of the passage, it is clear that we continue to be disciples. Becoming a friend of Jesus doesn't mean we don't seek to follow Jesus' commands as we best understand them. After all, he says, “you are my friends if you do what I command.”

Jesus' words about friendship are connected to his death. He was willing to give up his own life for others. So also, all those who share this bond of friendship are willing to lose for the benefit of others.

Being connected together in Christ is not masochistic – that would be a tragic misunderstanding – but there is a sense of ceding and willingness to experience loss for the sake of the other.

In order to be connected to the vine, and to abide in the love of Christ we will need individual and corporate practices that make this an experiential reality rather than simply an idea.

We start by noticing our primary images of God. Do we think of God as demanding? easily-angered? all-permissive? Loving? Distant?

Practices like centering prayer and silence, meditative reading of scripture, repeating short prayers throughout the day, or even having objects that serve to remind you of God's presence – these are all ways to remain grounded, connected to the source.

Each of us must find the practices that work for us.

CONCLUSION

Some of us may feel connected and grounded, and others of us feel distracted, isolated, or anxious. Wherever you are at is OK and can be offered to God. Most of us are in various states throughout the day, depending on the moment.

Abiding is not something you *do*. Abiding is stopping, resting, opening ourselves to that connection. May the Spirit of Christ animate all that we do, say, think, and feel, as we learn to abide.

BENEDICTION

As we prepare to leave this time of worship, in the days ahead, each hour, each minute, each moment, may you abide in the deep love of Christ. Amen.