

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, oh God. Amen.

We are in the sixth week after Easter. So, in the church's calendar, Jesus has already died and risen to new and unending life in God. Yet here we are looking back in the Gospel of John to when Jesus was still carrying out his earthly ministry, spending time with his disciples and friends, and teaching in his signature way of using metaphors. In today's metaphor, Jesus says he is the vine and his disciples, which includes us, are the branches. And as we abide in Jesus's love a word that Mark preached on last week, we are making our home with Jesus. Our intimate friendship with him brings us into his direct union with God so that we can also draw on God's life-giving spirit like a branch that draws on the life-force of a vine.

In abiding, we can stay deeply connected in at one with our source of life that invigorates our lives and allows us to produce good fruit so that we can all fulfill our life's purposes and contribute to the flourishing of the whole garden, that is the world. I think that we are reading this passage six weeks after Easter, because producing good fruit takes time. Did you know that a grapevine's branches will grow buds at one spring, but these buds won't produce fruit until the following spring? So for a whole year, the branch just keeps staying put, receiving all the nutrients the vine has to offer until it is time to go beyond the bud to growing fruit. In the same way the disciples received from Jesus during his lifetime, through his teachings and their relationships, but it wasn't until after Jesus's death and resurrection that they would begin producing their own fruit that they would share with others and continue his work.

And as a church, we recently experienced all the events of Holy Week culminating in Easter, and the impact of these experiences will take time to work in and through us to become part of us and change us, and to inform our actions in the world. It may not be until this time next year that we begin producing the fruits of our encounters with resurrection. The Apostle Paul names fruits of the spirit as love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and as our gospel writer also names in today's reading, joy. All of these nourishing fruits are byproducts of our life in God, a result of patterning our lives after Jesus's example in all the ordinary and significant events that we go through, and just like the branch waiting for its buds to produce grapes, these fruits take time to grow in us. So how do we do this?

This is where Jesus's teachings are very counter cultural, where they go against many of the values ingrained in us, about working hard and staying busy and getting ahead. Jesus doesn't say to put all your energy into growing virtues in yourself or in doing good works. Instead, he says, to abide, which really doesn't have anything to do with doing at all. Abiding is about being, being present to God's presence, which is in you and around you and always available to you. Abiding is about staying so close to your source of life that you are as unified to God as the branches to the vine, and all of your productivity and growth comes through the life force that is first feeding you.

Abiding in God's love is a radical act of rest and surrender. You don't have to do anything to deserve God's love. You don't have to prove yourself worthy enough to receive God's love. You don't have to earn God's love. In fact, the more you strive and manage and control, the more you are preventing God's love to flow through you and to replenish you, and positively impact those around you. In one of our summer books this last year, *Rest Is Resistance*, Tricia Hersey talks about the need for rest in our culture, saying we must uncover, simplify and let go of our addiction to busyness. Let our rest be our resurrection. Let the veils be lifted so we can feel, see, taste and smell the power of our rested selves. May we realize a full mental shift must be made to reimagine and reclaim rest as holy.

Could it be that we're getting in our own way, even when our intentions are good, that all of our busyness and good works and achievements have become the focus instead of surrendering it to the work of God's spirit in us and allowing space to receive the fruits of this work, making our acts of

service an offering from our union with God? Jesus says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." And Hersey challenges us saying, how can we access pleasure, joy, and liberation if we are too tired to experience it? And I'm sure many of us can relate to this today of feeling tired and overextended with busy schedules and busy minds and heavy obligations. What would it look like for you to rest?

Jesus says, "I do not call you servants. I have called you friends. You did not choose me, but I chose you." It's only after establishing his relationship with his disciples that Jesus goes on to say, "I have appointed you to go and bear fruit. Fruit that lasts." Jesus is saying that you are first and foremost important, apart from what you do, and apart from what you produce. Your relationship with Jesus and the divine have value simply because you exist. You're not in this world to be God's servant, but to be God's friend. You're not here to earn your way into God's good graces. You are here because you have already been chosen to be here. You're not in this world to be a human doing, but a human being. You're not here to strive to make something of yourself, but to be who God created you to be and to surrender to the work God is continually doing in and through you. You're here to experience the fruits of God's spirit at work in you, including Jesus's joy, and to let that joy come to completion in you.

And like all the fruits of God's spirit, joy may take time to grow. It may take allowing space to rest, so you can begin to let go of your busyness and reimagine and reclaim your life as holy. Joy is a gift the Spirit can and will give. As Jesus says, "The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

So, as we continue in our Easter season, these weeks following our celebration of the resurrection, may we practice resting in and receiving from God, staying as close to our source of life as a branch to its vine. May we ask God to grow in us fruits that last, as a result of God's activity in us. May we let go of our busyness so that we can reclaim our lives as holy and reimagine

what it means to be God's chosen friends. And may our rested selves experience the joy that is available to each and every one of us, of living into Christ's resurrection. Amen.