

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Fifth Sunday of Easter Gospel Word
John 15:1-8

Fittingly, the Church, still awash in Easter water, chooses a Gospel reading that is about living in the fullness of the Christian life. The land where Jesus lived supported many grape vines. The people who listened to him knew what was needed to keep the branches alive. It wasn't enough to care for the branches or the leaves. Special attention had to be given to the vine itself. It had to be pruned and watered so that when harvest time arrived, the grapes would be ripe, sweet and abundant.

Once again, we are allowed to listen in on the table conversation at the Last Supper. Eating together, especially at this very important meal, served two basic needs. First, it provided nourishment and at *this* meal the opportunity to realize that Jesus was the source of all human longings and sustenance. Second, it was an opportunity for Jesus and his disciples to deepen their love and strengthen their relationship for each other. Quite fittingly, Jesus expressed some of the most loving words he ever said to his disciples that evening. He spoke of his deep and lasting love for them. He told them to love one another as he loved them. Today, we hear these words as addressed to us. Jesus used the image of the vine and the branches to help us understand that his life, his grace-filled presence nourishes us and helps us bear fruit. Through the waters of Baptism and the food of Eucharist we are deeply connected with the Risen Christ.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

There is an important lesson we can learn from reflecting on the image of the vine and the branches. This is the time of the year that many of us start to think of planting. Whether it is a large vegetable garden or some flowers in a small window planter, springtime is our yearly reminder that we dwell on a living planet and we serve the Creator by focusing our energy on increasing life within us and around us. The call to care for nature and to be connected to it has strong Christian overtones. It is a faith-filled act to take care of the Earth, to protect it from harm and to nurture and conserve it for future generations. We are connected to the God of creation through the Earth.

A very different but more contemporary image of connection for us might be our cell phones. Recent studies indicate that over 80% of us now possess this technological wonder. It has become an *essential* part of our lives. It allows us to remain connected to those we care about wherever we might be. Husbands and wives, parents and children, co-workers and friends stay connected in a way not possible even 25 years ago. We have our "networks" and they provide life—giving sustenance and connection for us in our mobile society. We have the experience of being "a connected people." If Jesus had lived in our time, would it be possible he might have said that we were always connected by just "a click" away? Or by "the push of a button." Research on *burnout* suggests that this condition can be caused by a lack of closeness or intimacy in our lives. If we feel alone and without support, we are very vulnerable to feelings of being overworked, under-appreciated, or depressed.

This week, let's examine our relationships with family and friends. Are we making enough time to enjoy those close to us? How are our connections? Weak or strong? Are we making an effort to nourish our relationships? Or do we just let them drag along? Relationships need care and attention. How are we doing in this regard?

One-line Prayer

Creator, I long to stay connected to you.
You are the source of life and love.
Amen

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Around this time of the year, many start to think of planting. Whether it is a large vegetable garden or some flowers in a small window planter, springtime is our yearly reminder that we dwell on a living planet and we serve the Creator by focusing our energy on increasing life within us and around us.

Fittingly, the Church, still awash in Easter water, chooses a Gospel reading that is about how to stay alive. The land where Jesus lived sported many grape vines. People knew about the care needed to keep this source of nourishment alive. It wasn't enough to care for the branches or the leaves. Special attention had to be given to the vine itself. It had to be pruned and watered so that when harvest time arrived, the grapes would be ripe, sweet, and abundant. There is an important lesson we can learn about our lives by reflecting on vines and branches.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 15:1-8

Once again, we are allowed to listen in on the table conversation at the Last Supper. Eating together, especially at this very important meal, served two basic needs. First, it provided nourishment and at **this** meal it provided the opportunity to realize that Jesus was the ultimate food and drink. Second, it was an opportunity for Jesus and his disciples to deepen their love and strengthen their relationship for each other. This happens at all good meals that are shared with family or friends. Quite fittingly, Jesus expressed some of the most loving words he ever said to his disciples that evening. He spoke of his deep and lasting love for them. He told them to love one another as he loved them. Today, we hear these words as addressed to us. Jesus used the image of the vine and the branches to help us understand that his life, his grace-filled presence was shared with us, just as the life of the vine flows into the tips of the branches. We can hardly imagine such endearing words. We are deeply connected with the Risen Christ, especially when we celebrate today the Eucharist that he instituted many years ago.

Thought for the Week

The cell phone has become a fixture in contemporary life. Recent studies indicate that over 80% of us now possess this technological wonder. Its inventors could not have even imagined this. Nevertheless, it has become what might be called an **essential** part of our lives. It allows us to remain connected to those we care about wherever we might be. Husbands and wives can find each other when they need to talk. The same holds true for parents and children. Parents can feel less stressed when they know that they can connect with their children in those worrisome after-school hours. Another benefit has been the ability to stay connected with aging parents. Now available are special cell phones for the elderly that have easy to read numbers and a system in place where they can simply press a button and have an on-call operator connect them with whomever they wish to reach. We are truly "a connected people."

Let's move that same idea into the spiritual realm. Jesus desired us to know that we remained connected with him all the time. He used the image of the vine and the branches to help us understand this. Today, we might hear Jesus saying that we were always connected and just "a click" away. Or, with "the push of a button." Why not? We are deeply connected with Christ all the time: 24/7! That is the message of today's Gospel reading.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

Research on parent burnout suggests that this condition can be caused by a lack of closeness or intimacy in our lives. If we feel alone and without support, we are very vulnerable to feelings of being overworked, under-appreciated, or we never have enough time for anything good in our lives. These are symptoms of burnout. This week, let's examine our relationships with family and friends. Are we making enough time to enjoy those close to us? How are our connections: weak or strong? Are we making an effort to nourish our relationships? Or do we just let them drag along? There's an old principle about life that says that if something is not growing, it's dying. Relationships need care and attention. Jesus talked about the importance of being connected with him and with each other. How are we as parents doing in this regard?

Car or Meal Talk

Let's each recall and name a time that we were **really connected** with others in our families.

One-Line Prayer

Triune God, Let's connect! Amen.