

## Growing in Love

John 15:1-11  
April 28, 2024

First Presbyterian Church  
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Do you know what were the first words ever spoken on the surface of moon? “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit.” Those words were spoken by Buzz Aldrin on July 20, 1969, just moments after he and his crewmate Neil Armstrong land on the moon.

Aldrin had brought with him a tiny communion kit, given to him by his church. Just after they landed, he radioed Houston Control and requested a few moments of silence and thanksgiving.

“In the radio blackout,” said Aldrin, “I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me.

In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit.’”<sup>1</sup>

Those are powerful words of scripture, aren't they? And yet, on the moon they had no effect. Because no one was there to hear them spoken, Jesus' words never took root on the surface of the moon.

That's how important it is that we hear those words and apply their meaning in our lives, in our world. Jesus spoke those words that they might take root in the hearts and minds of his disciples and, as he said, “bear much fruit,” thrive and spread throughout the earth. We as followers of Jesus are instrumental – critical really – in his words bringing forth fruit.

In our New Testament lesson, Jesus tells us what is necessary for us to grow and thrive in this world – love. “Abide in my love,” says Jesus. “... so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

He says this right after giving us a lesson on how to abide in Christ – how live in Christ – and in that, how to live in the love of God and neighbor.

“I am the true vine,” says Jesus, “and my Father is the vine-grower. ... Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.”

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Carrell, [godandscience.org/apologetics/communion.html](http://godandscience.org/apologetics/communion.html). Retrieved November 27, 2008.

Here, Jesus is using grapevines to teach us about our relationship with God, our relationship with Jesus, and our relationship with one another. There's no mystery here – God is the vine grower, Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and the essence of the fruit that we bear on behalf of God is love. What is so hard about that?

The hard part for us branches is staying connected to Jesus the vine. And yet, that's the only way that the seeds of love that God planted in our hearts can spread throughout the earth, throughout this nation, throughout our communities, and throughout our families.

If you're not seeing love spreading out across the earth, sweeping across this nation, flowing through your community and washing over your family like a gentle rain, the good news is, there is something you can do about it.

If you want more love in your life and in our world, ask yourself, where have you become disconnected from the source of God's love, from Jesus the vine?

Where is the flow of God's love cut off in your life, in your relationships? And how can you nurture it, so that it flows freely again?

Jesus says that God, as the vine-grower, prunes every branch that bears fruit, so that it can bear more fruit. This means that God is looking at your life to see where love is flowing and where it's not. Through what Jesus calls pruning, God is actively working to reestablish the flow of love in all areas of your life.

Nancy McGuirk, in her article "God's pruning can be painful," challenges us to look at all of life's irritations as a form of pruning from God. "Consider for instance: traffic jams, long lines, misplaced keys, cold food, answering machines, nosy neighbors, being rushed, tight clothes, flat tires and doing dishes, to name just a few.

“Now,” says McGuirk, “think of how our perspective might change if we viewed each of these irritations as an opportunity to become more like Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, is a family member irritating you; what would be a loving response you could think of? Is your health bringing you down; how can you be more loving to yourself and to your body? Too much hate in the world; where could you be planting seeds of love?

These are not easy questions to answer – being more loving to a family member who irritates you; treating yourself, your body more lovingly, more healthfully; planting seeds of love in a world of hate. Not easy.

This is why Jesus warns us to stay connected to him, so that we don’t get lost amid all the hate and neglect and fighting. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,” says Jesus, “because apart from me, you can do nothing.” Do you believe that? Do you believe that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing?

I do. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing good, nothing that lasts. As he says, “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

That’s why it’s so important to be part of the grapevine of faith and love planted and nurtured by God. Those who stay connected – through Jesus – they are cared for and nurtured in their growth. And those who cut themselves off just fall away.

Oh, and there’s more for us than God and Jesus on the grapevine of faith and love. There are all the other branches, all the other people whom God loves and cares for. Some branches are lucky enough to grow in the light; others are struggling under the shadow of overgrowth, all the stuff that gets between us and God.

No matter where you find yourself – whether you’re enjoying the light or struggling in darkness – you are still part of the grapevine, you are still cared for by the vine-grower, by God.

Think for a moment about a grapevine, all those branches twisting and curling around one another. Can you picture it? What a mess; you can’t even tell where one branch starts and another stops. That’s because we are all in this together. We are all equally vulnerable to poor conditions, and we are all equally loved and cared for God.

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy McGuirk, “God’s pruning can be painful,” Women’s Community Bible Study, christianity.com. Retrieved December 5, 2002.

So, if you're a healthy branch on the grapevine of God, your purpose is to help the love and nurture of God flow out to all the other branches – find ways of responding with love even to those who irritate you.

And if you're a branch suffering under poor conditions, find ways of supporting and growing your connection to the grapevine, to the family of faith. Reach out to the other branches - other people - around you for the love of God that they carry.

God's love flows freely through the family of faith, through this congregation. We are to carry that love throughout the congregation and out into the world, so that all people can thrive alongside one another, through our connection to Jesus Christ, who is the vine through which God works, as he patiently nurtures the seeds of love planted in our hearts, in your heart. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving God, you nourish us with your love and grace every day. When we live in you, your love flows out from us into every relationship, every word, every thought, every action.

Help us to use your love as a guide for others, so that all will come to blossom in your creative and forgiving love.

Help us also to live out your love at home, at work, at school; on the roadways and in the store aisles; with our friends and neighbors, and even with strangers we meet.

We pray, O Lord, for those dealing with injury, illness and disease.

Come alongside them, we pray, with your Spirit of healing, strengthen and recovery.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is our foundation and our peace, and who taught us to pray together, saying:

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**