



I am the vine; you are  
the branches. If you  
remain in me and I in  
you, you will bear much  
fruit; apart from me you  
can do nothing.

**John 15:5**

Greeting and announcements

Sharing our Joys and Concerns

**Prelude: Trumpet Air and Interlude**

**Stanley Vann**

Welcome in the Name our Lord Jesus Christ; Who was, Who is, and Who will come

May 2, 2021 The Fifth Sunday of Easter: The Vine: Jesus. The Vineyard Keeper: God.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, with You all things are possible. Show us through Your word how we can grow in our faith, and our service to Your Kingdom. Show us that without You, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit we cannot produce anything in our ministry. Guide us in our searching so we learn how You work within us to produce faith in others. Be here with us today, as You have promised. Strengthen our understanding as we praise you in this hour.

During this time of worship, center our hearts, our souls, and our minds on Your Presence with us as we lift to you the prayers of our hearts. We know You promise to hear our prayers always, and so with confidence, we come to pray for...

Our Church, for its leaders and congregation

Our world and our country

Our loved ones - keep them: keep them in health, in safety, in comfort, in Your care. Keep us, also and send forth Your Holy Spirit of truth, of comfort, and of power.

We pray for any among us who feel constrained, or emotionally distressed by our time and era and for any who need to know Your love for them in this hurting world.

We also lift to You those who need comfort as they mourn their loved ones. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, The comforter, who would remind us of Your promises that Nothing in life, or in Death, things present, nor things to come, nor angels or demons within our lives, nor anything in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from Your love in Jesus the Christ, our Lord.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**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 and power and the glory forever. Amen**

### **Opening Hymn: Christ is Made the Sure Foundation No. 559 vs. 1-4**

1. Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone; chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the church in one; holy Zion's help forever, and her confidence alone.
2. To this temple, where we call thee, come, O lord of Hosts, today! With thy faithful loving kindness hear thy people as they pray, and thy fullest benediction shed within its walls always.
3. Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain; what they gain from thee forever with the blessed to retain, and hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.
4. Laud and honor to the Father, laud and honor to the Son, laud and honor to the Spirit, ever three and ever one; one in might and one in glory, while unending ages run.

Call to Worship adapted from Psalm 22

Pastor: We offer praise to You, O God, in the gathered congregation;

**People: Let all those who seek the Lord praise God!**

Pastor: I pray Your hearts live forever!

**People: As we gather, we will praise the Lord forever!**

Pastor: May we proclaim God's righteousness so the next generation know about the Lord;

**People: May future descendants serve the Lord.**

Pastor: May they proclaim God's righteousness;

**People: Telling those not yet born, what God has done.**

Pastor: We offer Praise to You, O God, in this gathered congregation;

**People: Let all those who seek the Lord praise God!**

### **Unison Prayer:**

**God of our hope, You have gathered us here to proclaim Your power within our lives, through Jesus the Christ. Open our hearts and minds, Like the Ethiopian who hungered for understanding of Your ways, and the proclamation of Jesus, Your chosen Messiah. Keep our faith connected to Jesus the True vine who nourishes us in our journey. Help us see the power that comes from our service to You, that enables us to witness to others who need to know You and Jesus within their lives. Accept our sacrifice of praise. Strengthen us in our faith. Lead us in Your ways, all the days of our lives. Keep us faithful as Disciples of Jesus so that the next generation comes to know our Savior.**

## New Testament Reading: Acts 8: 26-40

### Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south[a] to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” 34 The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”[b] 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip[c] baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.. nrsv

## Gospel Reading: John 15: 1-8

### Jesus the True Vine

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes[a] to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed[b] by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 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. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become[c] my disciples. NRSV

Pastor: This is the word of God for the people of God.

**People: Thanks be to God!**

Message: The Vine: Jesus. The Vineyard Keeper: God.

Our faith journey, and our mission or ministry, are a learning curve—it’s a growing and living thing. When I teach confirmation and new membership classes, I use John 15 at the very beginning, both as an attendance chart, and visual activity. Each person receives a picture of an empty grapevine stump, and each class we get to attach a new branch to that stump, and then we get to add bunches of grapes—the idea is that as we deliberately learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, little-by-little we grow and start to produce “Fruit.”

I like to, also, use the grapevine as the illustration of The Trinity: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—God is the ROOTS—without which nothing will grow or thrive; Jesus is the vine, which supports us; and the Holy Spirit of God is the sap that flows throughout the roots, vines and us, in order to produce fruit—us and others in the faith. In order to be a fruitful “disciple” we need to keep connected to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. (I acknowledge that our John passage puts God as the vine-keeper or the owner of the vine—who can lop us off to make room for a more fruitful branch.)

In my first church, the parsonage was in a vineyard, literally. I had grapevines all around me. I learned a lot about grapevines. I arrived at the church at harvest time, and I began by helping harvest the grapes—which were two kinds: those big juicy purple grapes that pop out of their skins when you squeeze them, and Muscadines which are large yellow grapes that are just as sweet. I was in heaven. The harvest was spectacular—all were allowed to eat as much as they wanted.

I was horrified, however, when the harvest was over that the entire vines were pruned all the way down to the stump, and roots. I had only experienced my grandmother's grapevines that were only “pruned back each year.” I was assured, the vines would come back in the spring. And they did—little by little, day by day, the vines began to grow and spread over the wires throughout the vineyard. The work, then, was to tie up the vines onto the wires so they wouldn't lay on the ground.

Here's the lesson for us, the disciples of Jesus, the true vine from John. First, I learned that each of those vines had a specific ROOT that was impervious to disease, or failure: GOD. The VINE STUMP, likewise, was a specific type of grape vine, JESUS. Ahh, but us the vines, need the VINE-KEEPER (God, from our John Passage) to keep us up from places that we can grow into or toward.

You see, we as humans, are like those vines that just keep reaching out-going wherever we desire. The branches from my North Carolina vineyard could grow, and root themselves into the ground—creating a new way of getting nourishment, not from the TRUE VINE. OR ROOT (God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit). We do that in our faith journey. We keep growing on our own, and leave Jesus, and God, and the Holy Spirit, learning things that may not be good for our journey of faith in God and Jesus.

There are so many different ways, different faiths, different avenues of life that don't necessarily produce the “Fruit” God would have us produce. We, as Christians, are to produce other Believers—like Philip did with the Ethiopian. Our United Methodist Church calls it “Making Disciples for the transformation of the world.” We can't do that if we are not nurturing ourselves with Scripture, Worship, the Sacraments, Praying, Praising—all the means by which we get nurtured and connected with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We can't fake it. We either get our faith through God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, or we're playing at being a Christian. That's why we're called Methodist, John Wesley had a “METHOD” to stay connected with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit; and to produce the “Fruit of the Kingdom.”

Here's the truth about the Kingdom of God. It is God's Kingdom. God owns the vineyard—us who want to be part of the Kingdom of God. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are profoundly willing and able to “nurture us in our faith, and to grow us strong enough to produce fruit—beautiful fruit.” But we have to be willing to remain “in the vine.” Often, like a wayward vine, we want to do it our way, or take shortcuts in our faith journey. God is fully aware if we are truly connected to the TRUE VINE, or if we are reaching out to “other ways and places.”

I was always shocked, whenever one of the vines was so fragile it would 'break off' as I was tying it onto the wire. I felt that I was harming the final harvest. But the others assured me that when a branch dropped off without fruit, it only made more nourishment for the true branches that were producing fruit—making the grapes on those branches sweeter and bigger. What they taught me was it is the same in the Kingdom of God. There are some who don't produce fruit, or even want to be connected to God, but that doesn't affect those persons who are growing flourishing by staying connected with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

God is fully aware of who is attempting to be fruitful vines. There will be a harvest, and God will greatly rejoice with each result of fruit that is produced—like we did at the last of the growing season. We don't have to worry, or stress out how the fruit is produced. We only have to grow within the True vine, that is connected to the True and Faithful root which sends the nurturing sap into the branches, day by day. As long as we are faithfully keeping ourselves connected to the vine, the fruit will come—and we like Phillip will be able to teach others about God, about Jesus, and about the Holy Spirit so their journey of faith grows, and is connected to the True Vine: Jesus.

The other hands-on illustration I used in confirmation and new membership classes was "growing seeds." Take my word for it, if you neglect your seedlings, they wither and die. I'm great at starting seeds, but once they become growing plants, I forget to water them, or plant them in the right place. We do that with our devotional life with God. We neglect meeting and talking with God. We become lackadaisical with our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We may even think we "know everything there is to know" about our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley-our progenitor in the faith, reminded his followers, just as Jesus is doing in our John passage, our faith journey is an on-going growth process. We have to nourish that growth, otherwise, it will wither and eventually weaken and die. None of us want that to happen—you wouldn't be in church week-after-week if you want your faith to wither and die.

The Ethiopian in our Acts story, shows how his faith journey was one of reading the Scriptures, even without understanding them, and eventually asking to be taught the meaning of what he was reading. God was faithful. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit sent Philip to teach him. God desires that grow in knowledge of Scripture, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God honors our desire to learn. God never over rides our free will. We have to ask and desire to learn about the truth of God and God's Kingdom, and about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is not a one-sided relationship.

God is able to teach each of us about this thing we call "The Kingdom of God."

You have been reminded that Jesus Christ is your Lord and that you are God's servants- you are loved -you are forgiven -and you are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as God's faithful ones in this world.

## Hymn: I Come With Joy No. 617, vs. 1-5

1. I come with joy to meet my lord, forgiven, loved and free, in awe and wonder to recall his life laid down for me, his life laid down for me.
2. I come with Christians far and near to find, as all are fed, the new community of love in Christ's communion bread, in Christ's communion bread.
3. As Christ breaks bread and bids us share, each proud division ends. The love that made us makes us one, and strangers now are friends, and strangers now are friends.
4. And thus with joy we meet our Lord. His presence, always near, is in such friendship better known; we see and praise him here, we see and praise him here.
5. Together met, together bound, we'll go our different ways, and as his people in the world, we'll live and speak his praise, we'll live and speak his praise.

## Holy Communion

Pastor: The Lord be with you

**People: And also with you.**

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them up to the Lord.**

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Pastor:

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, Always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

And so, With your people on earth, And all the company of heaven, We praise our name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, And made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night to which he gave himself up for us he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said; "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, In remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**People: Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pastor:  
Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood."

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is your, almighty Father, now and forever.

**People: Amen**

### **Closing Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus No. 189, vs. 1-4**

1. Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature, O thou of God and man the Son, thee will I cherish, thee will I honor, thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.
2. Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands, robed in the blooming garb of spring: Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, who makes the woeful heart to sing.
3. Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight, and all the twinkling starry host: Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast.
4. Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations! Son of God and Son of Man! Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forevermore be thine.

Benediction:

Pastor: Praise God for all that God has given to you.

**People: We praise God with our hearts, souls, and spirits.**

Pastor: Praise Jesus for showing us all that God has given you.

**People: We praise Jesus for teaching us about God's Kingdom Truths.**

Pastor: Praise the Holy Spirit for surrounding You with support and comfort.

**People: Praise be to the Holy Spirit who surrounds us with love and care.**

Pastor: As you leave this place, let praise resound within your heart, soul, and spirit.

**People: We yearn to praise from the bottom of our being.**

Pastor: Go in peace, and may the peace of God remain with you always.

**People: Alleluia, to the One True God, and To Jesus the Christ, and to God's Holy Spirit.**

**Postlude: Hymn to Joy Tune by Ludwig van Beethoven, arr. by Albert L. Travis**