

**May 9, 2021 (Focus: John 15:9-17; Sixth Sunday of Easter; Mother's Day)**

This passage immediately follows Jesus' words explaining the divine-human relationship as akin to vinegrower-vine-branches where the vinegrower becomes the vine in order to connect and nourish the branches. Here he continues to expound upon the theme of abiding and fruitfulness but shifts more explicitly to name love as the connecting agent.

Why did God create the world? Why did God create humanity? Does God regret this creative choice, given the state of humanity?...

Maybe God is really tempted by now to take those giant heavenly pruning shears and just cut all the branches of humanity back to the vine, and start again, hoping for better fruit.

Modern version of the story from Genesis where Abraham tries to bargain with God to stop God from destroying the righteous with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah. Well, what if there were 50 branches still producing, would you destroy all of them? What if there were 50, 25, even 10, ...God's widely extravagant love keeps those pruning shears at bay, and allows us another chance to produce that fruit, the harvest of loving-kindness for one another.

It is God's love for all creation, including and especially humanity, that is behind all of creation. It is God's love for humanity that keeps God from giving up on this experiment in loving creativity. It. We see it in a mother's steadfast love for a child living with addiction. We see it in a veteran father's love for his war-protesting, disarmament-advocating child. We see it in loving motherlike care of a nurse for a COVID patient, sacrificing sleep and their own well-being for the sake of duty and their calling. We see it in the father who remembers, after much effort, the way

each of his children likes their sandwiches made and cut and loving presents lunch to his kids, too distracted by video games and texts to notice, but he does it anyway. We see it in the calls for justice through tears of yet another parent who fears for their child driving while black or going to school at a time when love of guns and fear of others are the gods we have created and seem to love most.

For some of us, we have or had glimpses every day of our lives of what divine love might be in the words and actions of our mothers and fathers. For some of us, we might have only had one or two such glimpses in the midst of troubled relations with our parents, but maybe found those more constant glimpses of what divine love might be in the words and actions of others who mothered or fathered to us, other relations or mentors or friends.

But these earthly examples, great and wondrous and special that they might be or have been, are but a small portion of what divine love truly is. The love of God, Father, Abba, Mother Hen, is the love that Jesus felt, and shared with us. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. As the vine-grower feeds the vine, so the vine feeds the branches, and then what happens? The branches can produce fruit. The love that feeds us, from God through Christ and for us, is the fruit we produce, the fruit that will last, that will give life and sustain all creation through whatever may come our way.

It was God's love that propels every iteration of God's abiding presence, from the love of the Creator who breathed life into the first human beings to the Liberator of the Exodus story who manifested in the cloud that guided their journey to the voice of Truth spoken through the prophets to the Word made flesh, who continually preached this message that today might seem like the sort of message printed on a greeting card, lovely yet utterly expected. In Jesus' time it was anything but benign and

expected. John the Baptist was trouble because he preached about repentance, which was bad enough. Now here comes this preacher from Galilee saying God loves everyone (even the poor? Even the outcast? That's not what they were used to hearing). And preaching that because of God's love, we should love one another. Surely he doesn't mean everyone—love the Samaritans? The gentiles? The Roman pagans? That kind of message is too dangerous to let it go unchallenged.

And what about today. Christians across the globe read Jesus on Sunday morning calling us to “love one another” and we all say “how nice.” Then what happens during the week? What happens Sunday afternoon? Discrimination, fear, anger acted out, lies perpetrated and repeated about whole groups of people, and yes, killing upon killing upon killing. We arm ourselves against those we are supposed to love, and we call ourselves Christ followers.

It is an utterly extravagant, reckless sort of love, God's love, beyond our limited imaginations. And if we would just believe we have such love in our lives, that God truly loves us and our cup does indeed overflow with it, then maybe, just maybe, we could truly love one another. If we would just believe we have such love in our lives, that God truly loves us, just as we are, what extravagant and truly blessing fruit we could bear. Let's try that out for a change, believing that God truly loves us, and see what could happen!

Let us turn our hearts and minds again to God in prayer. God of all, wrap us in your love and care today. May we each in our private concerns hear your universal call to come, lay down heavy burdens, and find a welcome rest, find renewal, find new patience and strength and courage to carry on.

O Compassionate One who is mother and father to us all, bless those who mother to others. Across our globe mothers are struggling in these days, worrying over the health of their loved ones, wondering about economic security, hoping for a better day. We especially pray for mothers juggling work and housework and home schooling, for those who are quarantined from their children because of illness or because their work puts them at risk for the virus, and those who cannot choose not to work because of economic strain. Bless the mothers who fear for the lives of their children because they live amid violence, in place of war or extreme poverty, because their children are incarcerated or in detention centers. Bless mothers who mourn the loss of children to disease, accident, or violence. Bless Brianna Taylor's mother, and all those mothers who have to live without their children taken too early because of systems where racism and discrimination has been too long ignored, rationalized, or tolerated. Bless all those who mother to others; strengthen them, encourage them, empower them. Help them to give birth to a new way, a better world for all.

There are so many among us, in our community, and in the world in need of your healing compassion and care – grant all in need an experience of your renewing touch, especially...

We hold in our prayers today especially those living in facilities that are in lock down, many of whom struggle with new ways of communicating, and those for whom the isolation is weighing on their mental and emotional well-being. Bless them and all of us with your healing compassion and care.

Silent prayer/meditation

God who cares for us like a mother hen, help us as we carry our personal loads. And then, with our burdens lightened even a little, may we be inspired to help lighten the load of others, so that we may all walk with the one we call Savior, who taught us to pray to you, saying, Our Father, ... Amen.