

April 29, 2018  
St. Nick's

Acts 8:26-40  
1 John 4:7-21  
John 15:1-8  
Psalm 22:24-30

### Bearing Kingdom Fruit

Hi! In case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm Nancy Springer, your new Rector. What a privilege and joy it is to be here at St. Nick's, although I must admit I'm a bit intimidated by the size of this pulpit! Can you see me in here from the back of the room? I'm just glad there is a step stool back here!

Seriously, though, I look forward to all of our Sunday's to come as we open ourselves to who God is transforming us to be through His holy word and sacraments.

One thing you will learn very quickly about me is that I talk about God's Kingdom a lot. You see, I don't believe that Jesus came to live among us, to die for us, just so that we can go to heaven "some day" but so that we can also live on earth as it is in Heaven.

Jesus came to live among us to teach and show us how we are to live in and participate in the building of God's Kingdom now, every moment of every day.

As we said in our opening prayer today, our life following Jesus is eternal. Eternity isn't the future or someday but all time from before creation, to now, and to .. well, to infinity and beyond. And if you didn't get that reference, ask a 30 something.

In today's gospel reading we are jumping into the middle of John's telling of Jesus' final evening with his disciples. His time with them is drawing to a close and he's wrapping up all that he has taught them through words and actions over the previous 3 years. He wants them to be clear about who he is, who God is, and who they are in relationship with him and the world around them. He wants them to know, he wants us to know, what it means to live as he taught us to pray for: on earth as it is in Heaven.

Jesus tells us, "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. 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."

Jesus isn't giving us a harsh judgement of "who is out and who is in" but kind, pastoral words about our true and real identity.

He is telling us that who we are and whose we are are the same thing. He is giving us an image of a binding relationship that is severed only when we choose to walk away. The only judgement given in this passage is on us, when we make the choice not to live as kingdom people.

When we break away from the vine, we wither not as an arbitrary punishment but as the natural consequence of our actions because we have disconnected ourselves from our true life source. We stop being fully human because we were created to live with God.

And to help us understand how to live in relationship with God, he created us to be in relationship with each other. We are connected to each other through our connection to the vine.

Think about a time in your life when a close relationship was severed, perhaps just by distance with moving away, or more dramatically by an argument, or even more painfully by death. Didn't - or if it is going on

now - don't you feel as if a part of you has withered? Part of who you consider yourself to be is caught up in the relationship, and when the relationship is broken, so are you.

When we don't tend to our relationship with God and allow Him nurture our identity in him, we become broken. Who we truly are, who we really are, who we are created to be, is utterly and completely dependent on the God who created us out of love to bear his image and to reflect that image to the rest of his creation.

Our purpose, our goal, isn't to live as perfectly as we can so that we can go to heaven when we die, but to live our human vocation within God's creation on earth as it is in heaven.

And yes, we all have a vocation. That's not a word to be saved for those of us who are ordained. It is God's calling to each of us to live into the person he created to be, building and serving his kingdom with all that we are and all that we have. We all have tasks to do as part of God's purpose for his world.

Our main task for this vocation is to be genuinely and fully human - to be God's image-bearers, reflecting God's wisdom and justice to the world and directing our praises to him. This is what we are made for.

Jesus came and died for us not to rescue us from this world, but to renew our purpose to live as God created us.

English bishop and theologian N. T. Wright describes it like this: "We ... are called to stand at the intersection of heaven and earth, holding together in our hearts, our praises, and our urgent intercessions the loving wisdom of the creator God and the terrible torments of his battered world." p 80

And so if we are created to be branches on the vine, how do we separate ourselves from the vine? By denying the purpose for which we are all created. By living on earth as it is on earth, by doing the things that build our own kingdom rather than God's. We call this upside down, backward, and out of order way of doing things sin.

Sin isn't just about breaking a rule, it is about not living as we were created to live. We have given our worshipping hearts over to the things of this world. Sin is missing the mark of our genuine humanness by aiming for things other than God's kingdom. Sin is rejecting our true vocation by not loving God and our neighbor as we are taught in all of scripture.

Sin is seeking our life source away from the true vine. And the natural consequence of this is to wither and to eventually die.

We've turned our vocation backwards. We've decided that making this world a better place, fixing this world is our job. We build our own kingdoms out of stuff and things held together by false-images. Scripture tells us very plainly that it is God's job and responsibility to set things right in this world and he promises to do so when the time is right.

Our job, our role, our task as Jesus followers is to live as kingdom people, showing the world who God is and inviting them into the forgiveness and love of his kingdom here and now. God's kingdom is made out of people bound together by love.

The natural consequence of living into our true created self, of abiding in the vine, living as we are created to live, bearing God's image to the world around us every moment of every day is that we flourish and we bear fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, those attributes that all God's image bearers have because he abides in us as we abide in him.

Jesus shows us how to live our vocation and take up our responsibility within God's creation and how to worship and praise God in all that we say and do. Worshipping our creator is not just a Sunday morning

thing but our continuous reflection of God to the world. All that we do together here on Sundays is to equip us to do all that we are called to do the rest of the week as disciples. God is glorified by all of it. Amen.