

I AM THE TRUE VINE, JOHN 15:1-11

Who Is I Am? #6

♦**Intro:** This text should really resonate with us because it's about connection, and connection has been a real challenge lately with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting our planet. So we're keeping our distance and feeling **disconnected**. We don't shake hands, we stand six feet apart. We're staying home from school, and work. Six million jobs have been laid off. And after all that we start wondering if connection is something we really want! I love a video one of you posted on Facebook (connection!). It showed an older woman hiding in a closet with a flashlight to get away from her husband who wanted her to watch all the Planet of the Apes movies with him. She whispered secretly that the quarantine convinced her this togetherness is madness! I think her words were something like, "This entire experience has made me very much aware that I want a man in my life, just not in my house! He can hook up my DVD player, my printer maybe, help me flip the mattress now and then, and then GET OUT!"

♦John 15 is about connection. Jesus is preparing to part from his disciples. And like a 911 operator with a dying person on the line, he urges them to stay in touch. Or like parents leaving on a date and making sure the kids have their number, and know where they'll be. Jesus wants his followers to know what to do when he's gone.

♦**1.** One of the major things we learn from this text is that we are not enough. Not the true vine. You are not enough to handle your life and I am not enough to handle my life, and none of us

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really have it in us to be what God intends for our lives to be. This is the reason Jesus urges his followers to stay connected. Now, don't get down too quickly. Jesus IS enough and we'll think about that in a minute but one of biggest human misconceptions is that we can handle whatever comes. Not true. Plagues and disasters have literally ruined millions of lives. But that's what most of the Jewish people assumed. They were God's chosen folk! They had the lineage! They were the "Vine" after all!

♦What you maybe don't know is that the vine was the national symbol of Israel, like the eagle is to America, or the big posters of the Emperor are to China. We put George Washington on our coins along with eagles. Israel put a grape vine on their coins. Other nations erect statues of their leaders in the capital. Israel inlaid a vine of gold, with leaves made of jewels on their temple. The Vine is Israel all through the Old Testament! But even in the ancient scriptures that picture of the vine often is described as an unproductive one. Isaiah chapter 5 pictures Israel as God's vine that he cares for but which failed to produce any grapes. The prophet Ezekiel likens Israel to a vine that turns out to be worthless because they were unfaithful.

♦So when Jesus comes along and 1) uses the sacred I AM name of God and then 2) says he is the True Vine, he's saying that he is all that Israel was always supposed to be but couldn't. In other words, they are not enough. You are not enough. And neither am

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I. This should come as no surprise for Christians raised on grace through Christ, but we often assume otherwise if we're honest.

♦What was Israel supposed to be? Well for one, they were supposed to be the "light of the world", the ones who brought God to the darkness. When called Abraham, the father of Israel, he specifically pointed out that this calling was to reach all the nations of the earth.

♦"*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing....and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" Genesis 12:2, 3, NIV.

♦After leaving Egypt, and at the foot of Mt. Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments from God, Israel was told they were a "kingdom of priests", you know, people who connect other people to God.

♦"*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.*" Exodus 19:5, 6, NIV.

♦The Prophet Isaiah repeatedly reminds Israel that God is after the nations of the world.

♦"*he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that*

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you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.””

Isaiah 49:6, NIV.

♦Are you getting the picture? The reason God made the people of Israel, God’s “vine” was that they would **connect** his kingdom influence throughout the earth. They were to be the conduit to Heaven. But they couldn’t do it. They weren’t doing it. And that’s why he sent his Son, to be all that Israel, and you and I cannot be.

♦What was it we can’t be? We can’t be holy and keep all God’s commands. We can’t keep from sin. We can’t cause the world to know God and turn to God. We can’t earn our way to heaven. We can’t balance out our bad. We can’t overcome our own personalities. Jesus told his 12 disciples, who walked and talked with him daily

♦*“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

John 15:5, NIV.

♦Friends, it is tremendously important for us to face our inability. As long as you believe that lie that you have what it takes to make your life work, you will miss out on the power of God in Jesus. If we live by the assumption that mankind will find a cure, or we will overcome, or if I just put my mind to it... -we are in

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for disappointment. Just try it. Try not to sin for 24 hours. Then we can discuss whether or not you **wanted** something someone else had, or if you **wasted** time or money, or if your own face in the **mirror** preoccupied your time, or what you **didn't tell** you parents, or you spouse, or what you did tell the **IRS**, or your demeanor when you talked to the one person who **irritated** you, or whether you **thanked** God for anything at all, or how many times you even **thought** about God who you can't see, or **cared** about those with less, that you can see, or whether you've kept yourself **sexually** pure, or if you fudge on your **timecard**... It's really not that difficult to conclude that you and I don't have what it takes to be what God requires. You and I need someone who can! A Savior!

♦Furthermore, for anyone to fail to see or know their inability is for that person to stay stuck wherever they are. Take any addicted person who believes they don't have a problem, or at least can handle it, and see how they're doing with their addiction. Ask anyone how they felt when they were **surprised** by the cancer or illness they never imagined they had. People tell me all the time that they may not worship Jesus, or obey the Bible, but that they're very spiritual! This should not be a comfort to us, friends. The devil from hell is also *very* spiritual.

♦Hopefully then, we are eager for the help Jesus offers us.

Because he is in fact the True Vine, the one who IS and CAN

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BE all that God, holiness, and heaven, and full life require.

Why not make some effort to “connect” to God through him?

♦2. Now we come to another of the main ideas of the text: to **remain**/ or abide in Jesus, like a branch has to be attached to the vine in order to produce grapes. Cut it off and hang it on the fence and you will never get juicy, purple pre-raisins! I’ll bet you noticed the term in the text. I counted 12 times, it’s almost annoying, right? Even the phrase in vs 16 *fruit that will last*, is literally *fruit that will remain, or abide!*

♦ One thing to “remain in Christ” means is to look to Christ in the details of life. I put it this way, because if and when we include our God in our details, we will certainly include him in the rest. But the opposite is not true. Lots of people save God for just the big things. So they pray when they get **cancer**, otherwise not at all. Or they wonder about eternity after getting in a car **accident** that nearly killed their entire family. Or when we really want to **make** the **team**. But this is not living life in the presence of God. And they we are not the people whose lives bear much fruit.

♦Might God have something to say about what we **eat** and how much? Shall we ask him before we order? How about that tick in your **knee** that you are sure will “work itself out”? Do we ask God if we should run to the **doctor**, yes or no? How about when you’re in the mall and you see something on **sale** (for some of us, that’s the clincher, right)? What about actually consulting Jesus in Menards before **deciding to buy**? You know, many folks

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wish that God was more tangible, and present in their daily lives, but they aren't talking to him about anything at all. What would it be like if while surfing **Netflix** we consulted God before choosing a show. I don't have to tell you what kind of morally inappropriate shows there are readily available to any juvenile. What I probably do have to tell you is that after watching them your **inner self** will be different, and probably not in an good way because what you feed on grows on you, that's why "remaining/abiding in Christ" is a bigger deal than you thought.

♦B. Another way to abide/remain in Jesus, and a synonym in our text is to obey his command to love. The truth is obeying any words/commands of Jesus will in fact make my life fruitful (v7). But specifically, Love is the second most repeated term in our text.

♦"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12, NIV.

♦"This is my command: Love each other." John 15:17, NIV.

♦"Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13, NIV.

♦Often times we may tend to think of obedience in negative terms, as though now we *have* to obey, or that to obey is to do what we do not want to do. We need to learn to see obedience as a positive term. To obey God is to walk in the way of love. It is a parents love that makes rules, not anger. It is love that tells your child not to swallow the gold fish. It is love that warns them

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not to lick the frozen flag pole. It's love that makes them do their homework. You want them to grow up prepared. And no, they won't believe you if you tell them it's love because sound travels slowly. Things you tell your kids often don't reach them until they're 49!

♦**Conclusion:** The beautiful part about this text is that there is a True Vine. We can remain/abide/ draw near. But we make a lot of senseless excuses for not connecting. Just take the excuses many make for not worshiping (one way to abide in Jesus) and try applying them to say, washing your hands, and see how logical they are. Here are 10 Reasons Not to Wash

1. I was forced to as a child.
2. People who make soap are only after your money.
3. I wash on special occasions like Christmas and Easter.
4. People who wash are hypocrites; they think they are cleaner than everyone else.
5. There are so many different kinds of soap, I can't decide which one is best.
6. I used to wash. It got boring, though, so I stopped.
7. None of my friends wash.
8. The bathroom is never warm enough in the winter or cool enough in the summer.
9. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier.
10. I can't spare the time to wash.

♦Now what if we told the CDC one of those in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic? Wouldn't that just sound silly? It's just as silly for us not to remain in/abide/obey Jesus and his commands. Just consider the potential fruit that this Holy Week focuses on!

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♦"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts (connection) on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." Hebrews 2:14-3:1, NIV.

♦Not just at Easter...