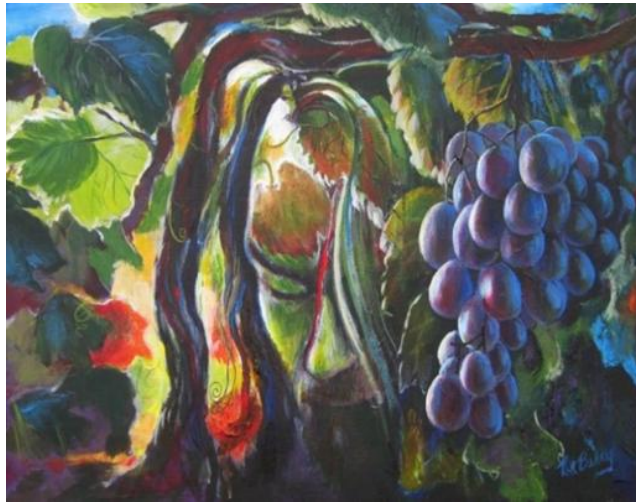


I AM THE TRUE VINE:

A Closer Look at John 15 (Excerpt 2)



⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

Ask whatever I will?

Awesome! Is it true? I can ask whatever I will?

If I am abiding in the Vine and his words are abiding in me...

My prayer will be in harmony with his heart and his will.

This kind of prayer is nourished by the Vine, inspired by the Vine.

So we abide in him---his promises, his commands, and his living Body. And his words abide in us, not as memorized Bible verses, but as words that are so alive in us that they rule our speech, our actions, our attitudes.

Once we are so deeply joined to the Vine, prayer becomes the foundation practice of our lives. The Spirit of God, who flows into us as sap from the Vine, begins teaching us how to pray.



The Spirit begins praying within us.

“Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.”

It will be done on God’s terms, in God’s way.

Even when we see nothing change, we keep on praying, knowing that no prayer prayed by a branch in the Vine is ever wasted. We pray, and leave it with God, and give him thanks.

As we ask and receive from the Father, fruit appears on the branch, words and deeds that glorify God, drawing God-thirsty souls as “fruit” into God’s Kingdom. ***“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.”***

“By this my Father is glorified”

---exalted, honored, vindicated in a world that lives as if there is no God. The living God is glorified by the fruit that appears on the branch in answer to its prayers.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Abide in my love.

Are we aware of that love? A love that knows each of us to the core, yet never turns away.

When we trivialize that love, or take it for granted, it fades from our minds.

When we abide in that love, it sets our hearts on fire.

We do not abide in his love by basking in an emotion.

There is only one way to abide in his love---

By keeping his commands.

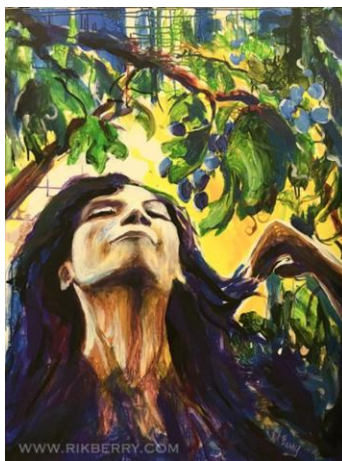
By doing his will.

By walking in his steps.

“Just as I have kept my Father’s commands and abide in his love.”

¹¹ “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

An unspeakable joy enters us when we listen to his words and take them into our hearts.



His joy.

All through those years of kingdom toil, for all the threats and insults that were thrown his way, Jesus was sustained by an unspeakable joy.

He was doing what he was sent to do. What could be more wonderful?

He was pleasing his Father by his child-like obedience. What could be more beautiful?

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will."

Luke 10

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Yes, Jesus knew deep sorrow, and so do we.

But beneath his sorrow was an unquenchable joy.

And this joy he gives to us, as we listen to him speak. Jesus is telling us these things

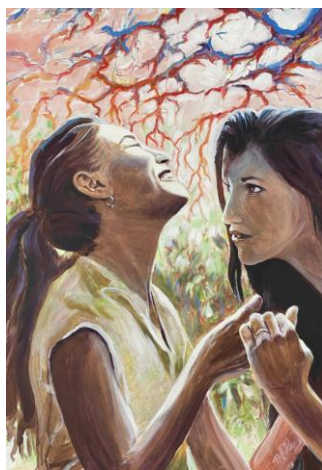
"that our joy may be full."

¹² ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."***

If we are going to abide in the Vine, we start by obeying this commandment right there in the fellowship where he has put us to serve him.

But did Jesus really put me in this outfit? When I first got here, I thought it was a church. But now I'm not so sure. Some of these people are hard to take.

***"This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you."***



When we think of it, we ourselves, are not exactly lovable.

But his love for us is total, overwhelming, sanctifying in its power.

So what choice do we have?

We are commanded to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

But we will only find the power to love our enemies after we begin to love our sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ.

To love them, just as they are, with all their flaws and failings.

The place where we learn to “love one another” is in the flawed fellowship where the Lord, in his wisdom, has placed us. Here is where we learn to forgive and be forgiven, to show forbearance.

Love “suffereth long and is kind.”

This kind of patience is only learned through practice. And the place where we practice it is in fellowship with sisters and brothers who are as flawed as we are.

¹³ ***“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.”***

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world died for all. He makes possible a new life for all, as his cross draws all to himself. (John 12) Sooner or later every living soul is offered forgiveness through his blood.

But Jesus’ death is a unique gift to his friends, those who keep his commandments. They alone know his love and share in his resurrection life.

When we obey his commandments, we are his friends, and he joins us to himself as branches on the Vine.



¹⁵ ***“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”***

If we are branches on the Vine, we are servants of God; we are servants to each other.

But we are more than servants to our Master;

....we are his friends.



As his friends, he continues to reveal to us the mysteries of the Father's Kingdom.

"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

John 16

If we abide in the Vine.....

We receive not only life from the Vine,

We are given light.

We are guided by the wisdom of heaven....

....so long as we stay focused on the Vine,

....so long as we avoid all the spiritual distractions that clutter this valley of flesh.

"You are my friends, if you do what I command you."



Prayer: Lord, help us to abide in you, the true vine, the true connection to the Father, to true life. Keep us deeply joined, so our lives, our attitudes, all our interactions are nourished by the sap flowing from your vine, from your Spirit, so that you are glorified by any fruit we bear because it is healthy, ripe, and life-giving. And as we abide in your love, may our hearts also be set on fire and filled with unquenchable joy. How could it be otherwise? And Lord, help to love others as you love us, to love our brothers and sisters, all those you bring into our lives, and even our enemies. May we embrace, honor, and rejoice in the friendship that you offer us for loving the way you love and obeying your perfect commands. Amen.

Message: Richard E. Bieber (in files since 2018, not exactly sure of when written)

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN