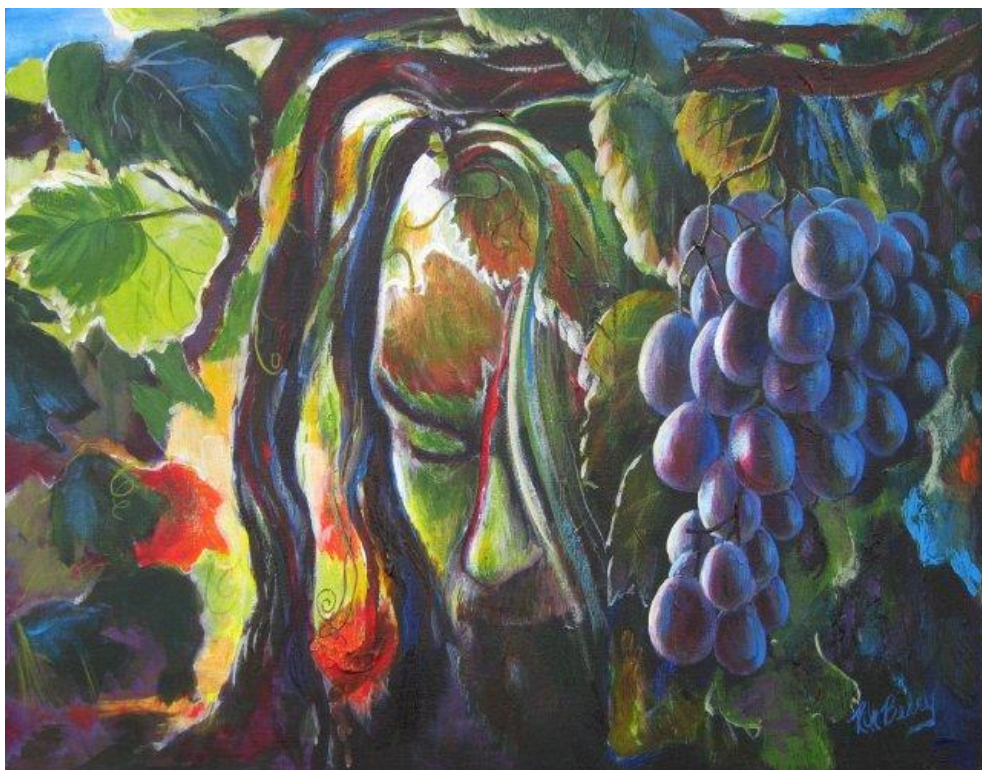


# **I AM THE TRUE VINE**



A Closer Look at John 15

REB

# I AM THE TRUE VINE

(A closer look at John 15)

*When we approach the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John with an open heart, time melts away, and we find ourselves poised on the threshold of Eternity. Jesus, crucified and risen, causes this discourse to lift us into his presence.*

*The Incarnate Word is speaking, not only to Peter and the disciples; he is speaking to us---to each of us as if to you alone, or to me alone. And he is speaking to us together as his disciples, as branches on his Vine.*

*The following notes on the Parable of the Vine and Branches are intended to help us focus our minds on the Master's words as they apply to us in the present moment. The words of Jesus have a mysterious power to explain themselves to anyone who approaches them with shoes off.*

*The 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John is not light reading. Nor are these notes. Yet if these notes can encourage us to read and reread John 15 until it soaks into our souls, they have fulfilled their purpose.*

This booklet is formatted with art from several artists, much of it based on John 15. The artists featured are:

- Neil Breebaart (Art Refined) pgs. 1, 8, 14, 15, 19, 22 & 24
- Jane Spencer pgs. 3, 13, 25 & 26
- Berna Lopez pgs. 4, 5, 7, 17 & 27
- Rik Berry pgs. 4, 10, 11, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 30 & 31
- Peter Koenig pgs. 6, 9, 17, 31 & 32
- Ramone Romero pgs. 24, 27, 28 & 29



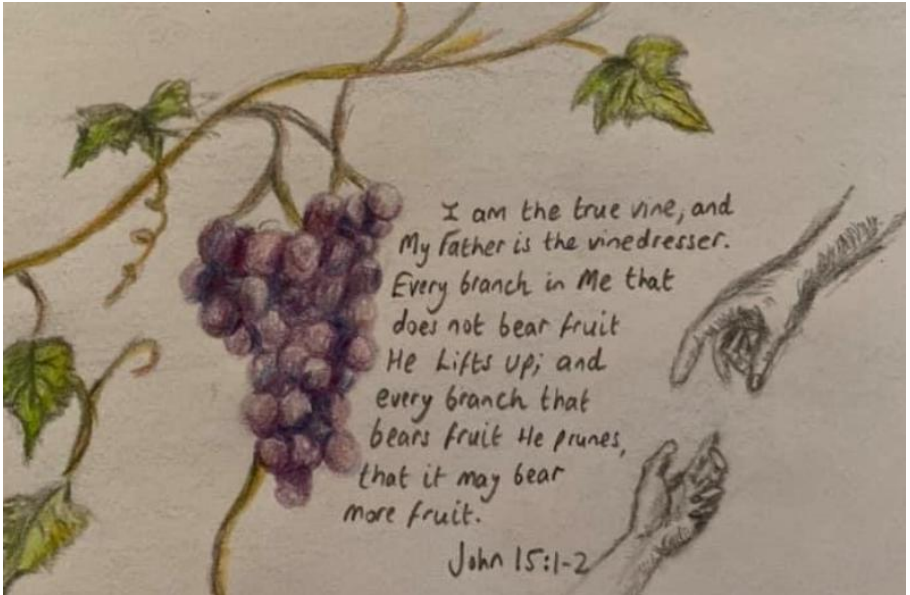
## **John 15 (BSB)**

<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, and every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes to make it even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are gathered up, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, proving yourselves to be My disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Remain in My love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and remain in His love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are My friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything I have learned from My Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose Me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will remain—so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. <sup>17</sup>This is My command to you: Love one another. <sup>18</sup>If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me first. <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, it would love you as its own. Instead, the world hates you, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. <sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they kept My word, they will keep yours as well. <sup>21</sup>But they will treat you like this because of My name, since they do not know the One who sent Me. <sup>22</sup>If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>Whoever hates Me hates My Father as well. <sup>24</sup>If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father. <sup>25</sup>But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated Me without reason’ <sup>26</sup>When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—He will testify about Me. <sup>27</sup>And you also must testify, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

**From the Berean Standard Bible (copyright free)**

## I AM THE TRUE VINE

*<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”*



Jesus is gathered with the eleven disciples (Judas has gone off into the night) following their last meal together before he is arrested. Within hours Jesus will be crucified for refusing to deny that he is the Son of God.

Only heaven sees the cosmic significance of Jesus' crucifixion, as the sin of this troubled world is funneled off into eternal Darkness.

For the disciples, for you, for me, this discourse has the power to keep us focused in a world which is always hostile toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all who follow him.

The Vine has the power to hold the branches firm in any storm, so long as the branches maintain their union with the Vine.

**To maintain that union is our essential calling.**

***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”***

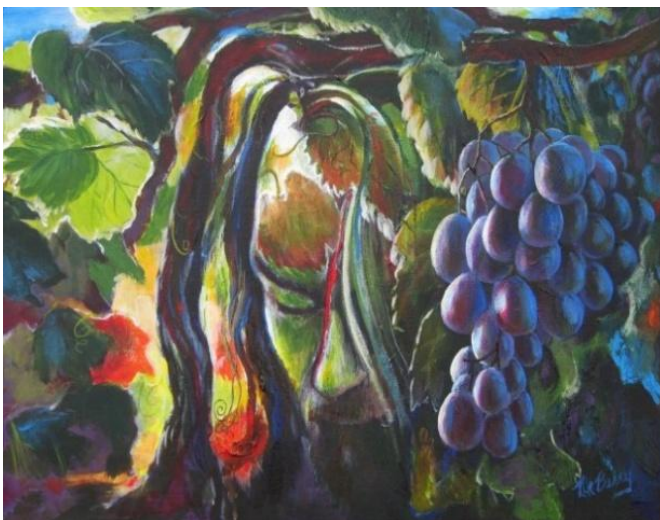
Jesus is talking to his followers, whether at that Passover Table long ago, or here in the fast-paced Twenty-First Century.



The words of this parable achieved their full force the instant Jesus emerged from his tomb as the Firstborn of the New Creation. Alive from the dead, the Vine is no longer confined to a human body.

The Vine encompasses the universe, while holding each branch in a personal communion.

***“I am the True Vine,”***





The true source of life from God. Wherever God is pouring out his redemptive power in this troubled world, the Vine is there with branches that are producing redemptive fruit.

This Vine, tended by our Father, is constantly undergoing change.



New branches are appearing.  
Healthy branches are being pruned.  
Barren branches are clipped off.

**Every branch on the Vine is a miracle.**

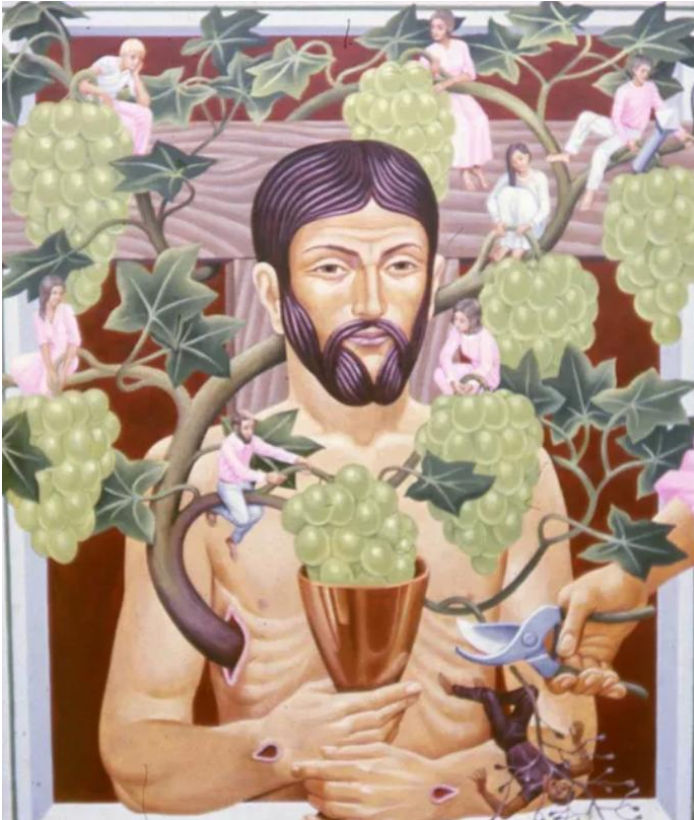
The branch did not choose to be a branch, it was chosen by the Vine. It was brought into existence by the Vine, as surely as each of us was brought into this world by no choice of our own.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, joined to him, heart and soul, it was not your doing, it was his.

He called you, drew you to himself, imparted sufficient faith to enable you to take those first steps of obedience.

Soon your branch began producing leaves. Even those leaves owe their existence to the Vine, who sustains you.

Now that you are a branch, your job is to bear fruit.



If you fail to bear fruit to the Vinedresser's satisfaction, you will be cut from the Vine.

If you produce fruit, the Vinedresser will keep pruning away everything that hinders, so that your strength increases, and your fruit multiplies.

*<sup>2</sup>Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

Each branch is meant to produce fruit in two forms:

**Words and deeds** that please God.

**Living souls** harvested into the Kingdom of God.

Both forms of fruit are produced quite naturally as the branch abides in the Vine. We do not produce fruit through effort, or skill, or force of will.

We produce fruit in only one way: by abiding in the Vine.

*<sup>3</sup>**You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.***

*The words of Jesus* that we have taken into our hearts began the pruning process as soon as we became branches.



For example, those words empower us to break the grip of Mammon on our hearts.

***You cannot serve God and Mammon.***

***Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.***

*Matthew 6:24b & 33*



*The words of the Master* empower us to repent of “the wandering eye,” to repent of our subtle attempts to exalt ourselves.

*The words of the Master* call us to abandon our compulsion to bend the truth to our own advantage---to repent of our hypocrisy.

**Each act of repentance is an act of self-pruning.**

As long as we seek to live by the *words of the Master*, the basic pruning has already taken place in our lives.

Now the Vinedresser stands by with the shears to keep clipping off the distractions.



***<sup>4</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.***

But how do we abide in the Vine?

What does it mean to abide in the Lord Jesus, daily, hourly?

We abide in the Vine....

**1. By living in his promises.**

Jesus promises us rest, as we allow him to be our Sabbath.

***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

***Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

***For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”***

*Matthew 11*

We come to him and join him under his yoke.

We walk with him in lowliness and learn.

And the Lord Jesus gives us rest. He is our continuous Sabbath.

Jesus offers a new start, by forgiving our sins.

*And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” -- he then said to the paralytic -- “Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home.*

Matthew 9



The closer we come to Jesus, the more we become conscious of our unworthiness, our sin.

Sin is our obsession with ourselves, our compulsion to play God, thinking and acting as if we are the center of the universe.

**Every sin we commit grows out of the basic sin of self-idolatry.**

We need to be set free from this curse. We need forgiveness more than anything else in the world.

So when Jesus says to us, ***“Take heart, Child, your sins are forgiven,”*** we need to live in that forgiveness. So that when the Lord says, ***“Rise and walk,”*** we are able to rise up and make a new start.

Jesus promises to guide our lives.

***Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”***

*John 8*



We abide in this promise by taking his words as our light. We walk in the light of those words, which sustain us in every situation. And when his words lead us to a cross, we follow him all the way, knowing that we gain our lives by losing them for him.

Jesus promises that we will be provided for.

***Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.***

***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.***

*Matthew 6*

We abide in this promise of provision by focusing our hearts on the Kingdom of God. When we seek God’s Kingdom above all things, heaven keeps opening mysterious doors of provision. There may be lean times, and times of plenty, but through all the ups and downs of daily life heaven will sustain us with more than we need.

Jesus promises to make us part of God’s World, the new Kingdom which will soon replace this world of sorrow.

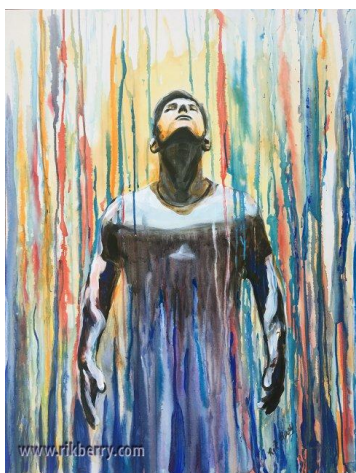
***Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news.”***

*Mark 1*

The Kingdom of God is the goal of everything Jesus did and is now doing. The Kingdom of God will be here in its fullness when the Lord Jesus returns to do the final sorting out of all things.

But for those who follow the Master...

**....the Kingdom is already here.**



Its power, its joy and peace become ours even in this life as we abide in the Lord's promise.

***Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.***

*Luke 12*

We also abide in the Vine ....

## **2. By obeying his commands.**

Commands? For most of us the very word, “command” is offensive. We’re tired of being ordered around by the demands and commands of others. And we’re not impressed with the righteous wimps that jump like frightened dogs at every command they hear.

We love those promises of Jesus, but we cringe at the word, “command.” Yet every command that Jesus gave us is given in absolute love. We can know the love of the Lord, and live in that love, only by doing what he tells us to do, by obeying his commands.

We abide in the Vine by obeying our Lord's command to **believe**.

*And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God."*

*Mark 11*

*"All things are possible to him who believes!"*

*Mark 9*

In a thousand ways the Lord Jesus commands faith of those who draw near to him.

Faith in God.

Faith in him.

Faith in his words.

We abide in him by deliberately believing in him, despite our "intellectual reservations."

Jesus commands us to love one another.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*John 13*

To abide in that command is simply to ....

**Live it. Do it.**

**Keep doing it.**

Even though we seem to be thrown by God into a fellowship where hypocrisy and apathy are rampant. These other believers are as flawed as we are. And we are going to obey the Master by accepting these sisters and brothers, honoring them. And serving them with a forbearing heart.

Jesus commands us to love our enemies.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"*

*Matthew 5*

We can only obey such a command by abiding in the Master. And we can only abide in the Master by obeying this command.



Jesus commands us to forgive.

***And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.  
For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will  
forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will  
your Father forgive your trespasses.***

*Matthew 6*

To abide in this command, we look to the Master to help us take the forgiveness he pours into our sin-sick hearts, and allow it to flow out of us to the one who deeply wronged us. To allow his mercy to flow out of us toward those toward whom our whole nature shudders in unholy disgust. We love our enemies by the power of the Lord Jesus who lives in us, by the power of the Vine.



***“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”***

Jesus commands us to be sexually pure.

***If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.***

*Matthew 5*

Past sins are under his blood, but now we put our body under his cleansing light. We look to the Lord to help us stay focused on the path of light he has opened before us.

**Apart from his grace, who of us is not lost?**

Sexual purity is essential to a life lived in the power of God. While Jesus was total mercy, when talking with the woman at the well, or the woman “caught in the act of adultery,” he makes clear that, once we step onto the Kingdom Path, our body is holy, and our sister or brother’s body is holy.

Jesus commands us to be faithful with money.

***He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.***

Luke 16

We live this command by disciplining ourselves to handle money under the eye of God. We seek to be faithful to him in the way we use it. The way we handle money is one of the clearest signs of our true connection with the Vine. When we abide in the Vine, money becomes our servant instead of our master.

Jesus commands us to speak with a sanctified tongue.

***I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.***

Matthew 12

If my heart is truly abiding in the Vine, it will show in the way I use my tongue.

If I am abiding in the Vine, he will no longer permit me to deceive, exaggerate, slander, or trivialize the holy without paying a price.

Jesus makes every word count. He keeps his words simple and clear. And once we join ourselves to him, we do the same.



***The Lord God has given me the tongue of one that is taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word, him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear as one who is taught.***

Isaiah 50

And finally, we abide in the Vine,

### **3. By serving in his Body.**

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body.*

*John 2*

Few people understand that the body that stepped out of the tomb before dawn on Easter is the ultimate Temple of God on this earth. The risen Lord is the Temple, the dwelling place of God on earth. One could say that the Vine is the Temple. And every branch that belongs to the Vine is part of the Temple.

We call it the Body of Christ on earth, this mysterious fellowship of disciples, these branches joined to the supernatural Vine.

And the branches abide in the Vine by functioning as faithful servants in his Body, which is the true church. Wherever believers are truly gathered in his name, we see a visible manifestation of the Body of Christ.

If I am truly a branch on the Vine, I will be part of his Body somewhere. I will be part of a gathering of believers, washing feet, serving my sisters and brothers in some way. I make sure that I am with them, when they come together to break bread. I hold these people in my daily prayers. I am faithful to them, for the Lord's sake.



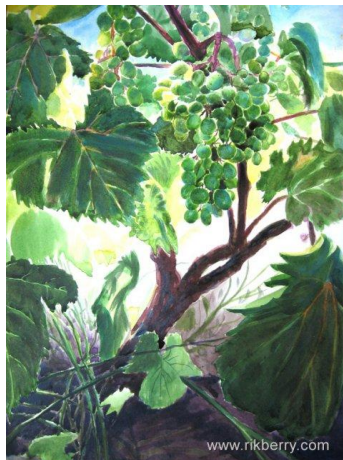
It is impossible to abide in the Vine and not be a functioning part of his Body somewhere. A branch, floating in the air all by itself, disconnected from sisters and brothers cannot survive.

When Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us, he's speaking to us as members of his Body. This kind of love can only take place in that motley crew which is gathered around the Master, to break bread, to pray, to share in the living Word.

It is impossible to abide in the Vine without abiding in true fellowship with each other in his Body on earth.

***<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.***

The branch does not produce fruit by straining and squeezing, planning and scheming. The branch produces fruit in only one way: by abiding in the Vine.



If we are joined to the Vine, heart and soul in the ways described above, we will bear fruit...

**Much fruit. Fruit that will last.**

All other "fruit" is fake fruit. It may look rich and abundant. But if it did not appear on a branch deeply joined to the Vine, it will nourish no one.

***"Apart from me, you can do nothing."***

***<sup>6</sup> If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.***



When Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration volunteered to build three booths, “*one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah,*” the voice from the cloud corrected him. “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.*”

The Father was telling Peter to listen to the Vine, and to no one else.

***“When they lifted up their eyes, they so no one but Jesus only.”***

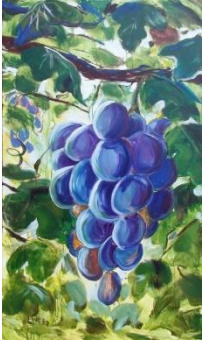
Our flesh is always trying to draw strength from Moses and Elijah as well. Trying to elevate our favorite thing like “tongues” or “healing”, or “signs and wonders”, or “eternal security.” The minute we seek to draw spiritual sustenance from something or someone in addition to the Vine, our branch begins to wither. The frightening thing is that these “half-baked” branches are sooner or later “cast forth” from the Vine.



These branches actually cut themselves from the Vine by refusing to “abide.” They let themselves get side-tracked.



The destiny of these branches is not pleasant, certainly not God's desire for them. And we can be sure that these branches were warned by the Spirit more than once, before they were cast forth, "thrown into the fire and burned."



*<sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.  
<sup>8</sup> By 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 Sprit 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.

***<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.***

***<sup>10</sup> 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---

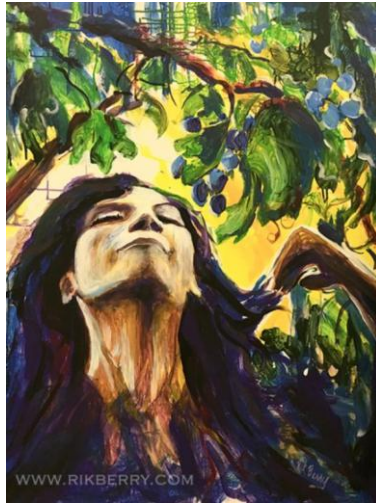
By keeping his commands.

Doing his will.

Walking in his steps.

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

<sup>11</sup> *“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.

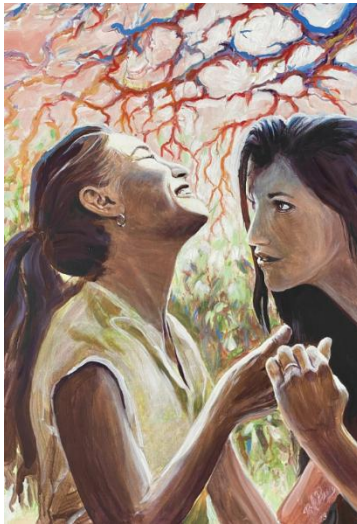
And this joy he gives to us, as we listen to him speak. Jesus is telling us these things *“that our joy may be full.”*

<sup>12</sup> ***“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.

*<sup>13</sup> “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> 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.



<sup>15</sup> ***“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.**

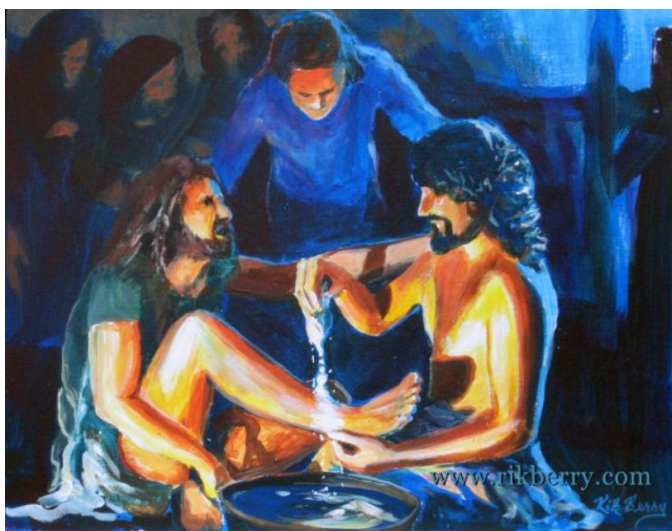
As his friends, he continues to reveal to us the mysteries of the Father’s Kingdom.

***“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.”***



<sup>16</sup> ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”***



“I have decided to follow Jesus,” goes the chorus we all love. But behind that “decision” was a decision we had nothing to do with: we were chosen by the Lord before we were born. We did not choose him; he chose us.

The fact that we are branches in the Vine is a miracle of grace. But we are free to walk away from our calling, to deviate from the path of discipleship and follow the desires of vanity, lust, greed.

We are also free to discipline ourselves to abide in this calling---to cling to the Vine and bear lasting fruit.

***“And that your fruit should abide.”***



So that these people who are drawn into the Kingdom through our witness should not be “saved” today and drift away tomorrow. We are to bear fruit that abides---disciples that endure as new branches on the Vine, bearing fruit of their own.

Any branch that bears that kind of fruit is a branch that prays. For Kingdom fruit is impossible without prayer. As the branch keeps growing in prayer, heaven’s windows open.

*“So that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”*

<sup>17</sup> *“This I command you, to love one another.”*

Why does the Master repeat this command again and again? Because we need to hear it again and again. Those who ignore this command always lose their way.

He is calling for a love which is more than a superficial mask, a love that is deeply willed in the heart. A love that forgives and asks for forgiveness. A love the “suffers long and is kind.” Lord Jesus, help us!

<sup>18</sup> *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”*



“Don’t expect the world out there to love you. Not if you’re following me. The world hated me, and it will hate you too. Get used to it.”

But make sure the world's hatred is not justified by your hypocrisy.

**If the world sees hypocrisy in you, and calls you on it,**

**That is not persecution.  
That's a call to repentance.**



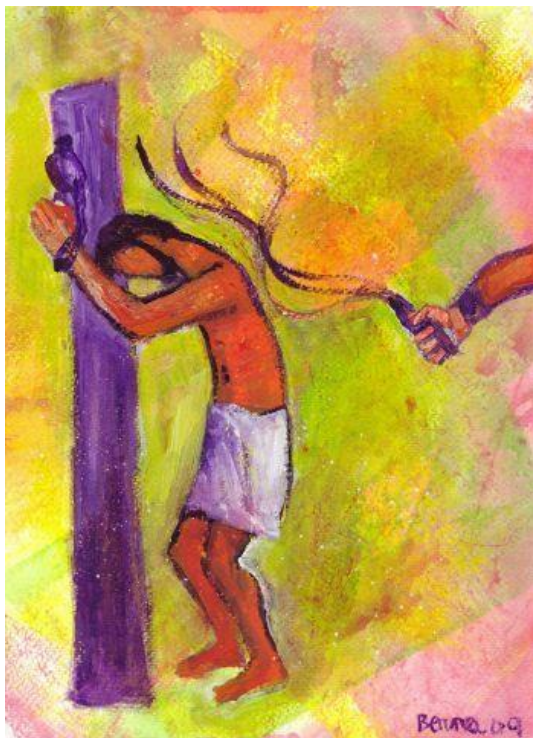
***<sup>19</sup> “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”***

While you live in this world like everyone else, pay your bills, buy your food, raise your children, you are no longer part of the world system. You are an alien and an exile. People will sense that you are an ‘outsider,’ and will have reservations about you. For the rest of our lives in this world we are “outsiders.” We belong to another world, another kingdom. But we do our best to blend in with the folks as naturally as our Lord did. He went to the synagogue, visited the Temple, he mingled with people of all levels of society. We do the same.

This world is the Vineyard where we are sent to work---even as inwardly we concentrate on abiding in the Vine.

<sup>20</sup> ***“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.***

<sup>21</sup> ***But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me.”***



Yes, we will be persecuted. But we will also bear fruit. “If they kept my word, they will keep your also.” This promise applies, of course, only to those who abide in the Vine.

If we abide in the Vine....

.... our word is his word...

.... and it will both draw and repel.

We will be persecuted as surely as our Master was.

But we will also make disciples.

**There is no such thing as a painless harvest.**

***“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”***

There is no such thing as genuine fruit in the sunshine of “continuous success.” *“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also.”*

***<sup>22</sup>“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>He who hates me hates my Father also.”***

Jesus makes clear that people are not held accountable for what they do not know. But once they hear the voice of God, coming through his Son, they are accountable for what they do with his Truth. If they turn their backs on this Light, if they refuse to walk in this Light, they have rejected grace with their eyes open. They have rejected the Son, who is the express image of the Father.

**Whoever sees the Light and turns away from the Light....  
.... hates the Light.**



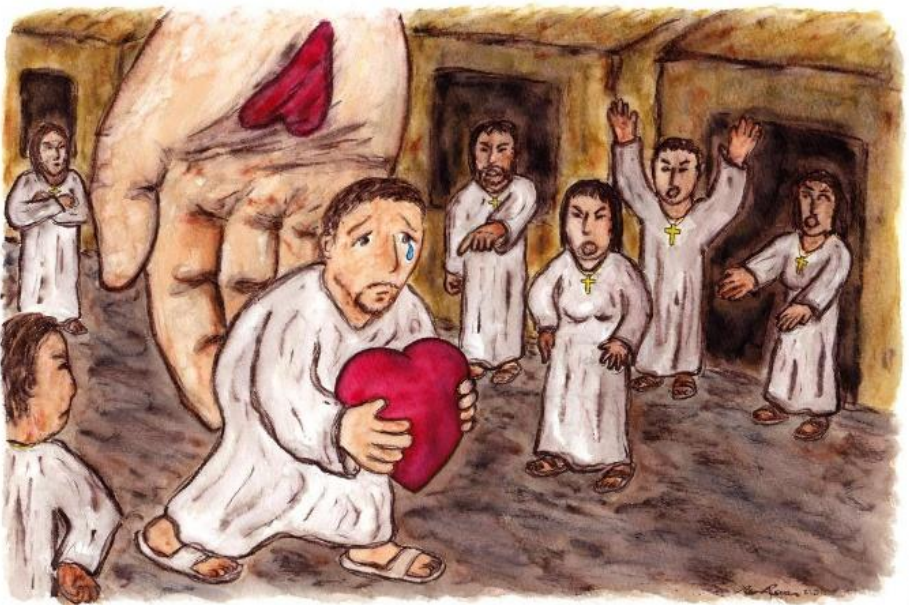
***<sup>24</sup>“If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.”***

Before the Son of God came on the scene, they were ignorant of the grace of God. They were not accountable. But now they have seen...

***“The blind receive they sight and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them.”***



What did they do with what they have seen? They turned away. They will soon shout, “Crucify!”



***“They have seen and hated both me and my Father.”***

It is impossible to be neutral, once we have heard the voice of God.

***“He that is not with me is against me. He, who does not gather with me, scatters.”***

There are millions out there who have never seen God’s mercy. That mercy will find them in due time, and they will have to decide what to do with it. But those of us who have heard the Shepherd’s voice are now accountable to God.

<sup>25</sup> ***“It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’”***

“Their law.” The Jewish Messiah is now speaking as God the Son, outside and above the Jewish nation.

***“Even in their law it is written, ‘They hated me without cause.’”***

And now, what was written has been tragically fulfilled.

<sup>26</sup> *“But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.”*



*“I will send you the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father. His one purpose will be to bear witness to me.”*

The Spirit will bear witness to Jesus with such power that those who have never seen Jesus will meet him in his word and believe.

**The Spirit is the creator of Faith, the revealer of Truth.**

By the Spirit’s power alone we hear the Shepherd’s voice and are drawn to him.

It is the Spirit who joins us as branches to the Vine.

It is the Spirit who flows from the Vine to the branch, producing fruit.

**The Spirit is the eternal witness to the Eternal Son.**

<sup>27</sup> *“And you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.”*



The apostles have a unique calling which belongs to them alone: to testify to the Master as eye-witnesses to his deeds and words.

Through their witness we have the gospels containing all the essential words of Jesus, and an essential vision of deeds, his death, and his resurrection.

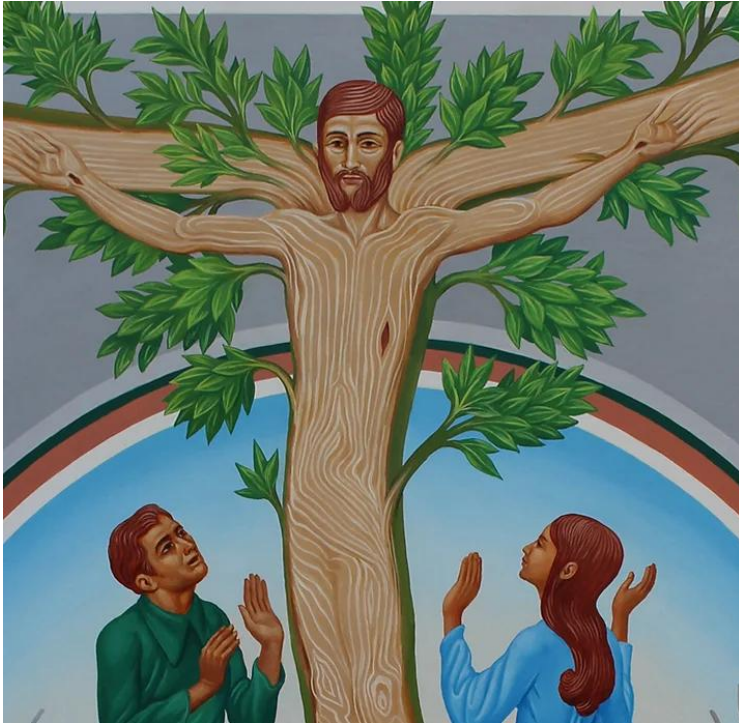
Between the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Spirit, all people of all ages will be drawn to the redeeming cross and offered life from God.





***“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth (on the cross)  
will draw all people to myself.”***

***John 12***



In a world which seems to be disintegrating before our eyes, the words of Jesus in John 15 rise up like a mighty rock in a stormy sea.

Amid the increasing uncertainty which surrounds our daily lives these words pierce the darkness and show us the way.

**Lord Jesus, give us ears to hear!**