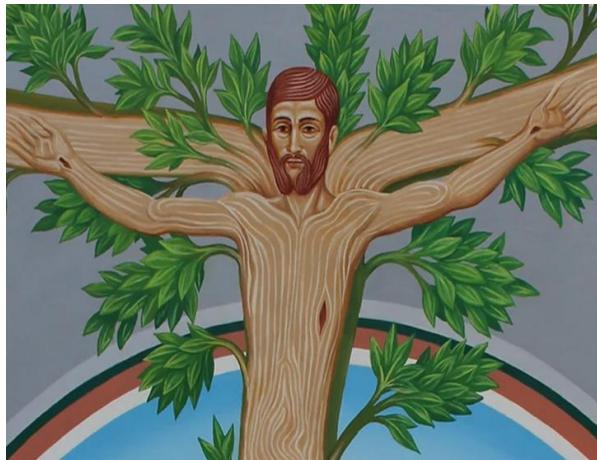


I AM THE TRUE VINE:

A Closer Look at John 15 (Excerpt 1)



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.

¹"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.

²**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.

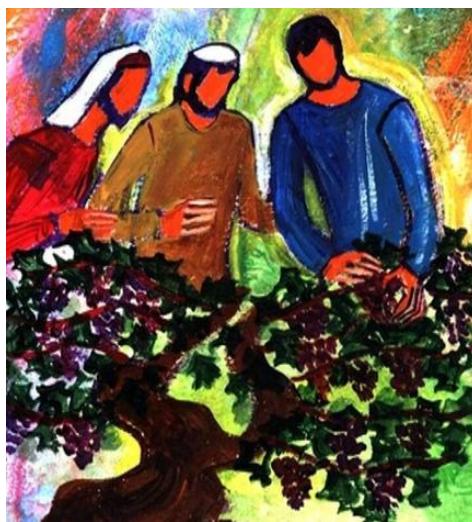
Living souls harvested into the Kingdom of God.

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.



Prayer: Lord thank you for drawing us to you, for grafting us into this vine, into life in you and life through you. And yes, what a miracle that we can be part of you. Help us to appreciate this, to keep abiding in you, to remain in you. Help us to accept your perfect, precise pruning so that we can be healthy and bear fruit. Help us to do what we need to do to maintain union with you, the vine. Amen.

Message: Richard E. Bieber

Featured Artists: Peter Koenig and Berna Lopez

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN