

Reflection for the 5th Sunday of Easter

John 15: 1-8

By Rosemary Murphy, PhD

On Becoming Fruitful Vines

Few of us here at All Saints have a vineyard or are engaged in growing grapes. However, many of us do have simple house plants. We know the importance of their care and how, with a little pruning and attention, they will flourish and often bring us much joy.

If we can think symbolically, the lovely metaphor of the vine and branches in today's Gospel from John (15:1-8) can enrich our reflection and be just as meaningful for us as it was for early Christians. Ever the devote Jew and Master Teacher, Jesus instructs his listeners using imagery that was familiar to them. Many of Jesus' followers, and the first century Christians for whom John wrote, were tenant farmers who would resonate with agricultural imagery. In their faith tradition they revered Old Testament prophets who often used vineyard imagery to express God's loving relationship with his chosen people and his displeasure when Israel failed to follow his law. John's audience lived in a culture of patronage and would understand the importance of glorifying God the Father, the Divine Patron, by the fruit of their discipleship. For these listeners, the intimacy and interdependence of the vine and branches worked on many levels.

The interdependence suggested by the vine and branches imagery is nicely stated by Jamie L. Waters' in her column for the Fifth Sunday of Easter in *America*, May 2021: "The Father is the vine grower, Jesus is the vine and the disciples are the branches. Jesus as the vine helps to link his followers with the Father. Moreover, it is the Father who cultivates the vine and enables the branches to bear fruit, discarding those that are not productive." (p.66)

It is in Jesus, in remaining connected to him—in abiding in him—that our relationship with God the Father is strengthen and endures. Through Jesus' word we are pruned for growth in our spiritual life and, like Jesus, we are able to be fruitful in serving the Father's will. The Divine Wine Grower cares for his Son and for us with great attention and tenderness.

This Sunday, let us acknowledge our dependence on God and be grateful for the love that flows from our Father to his only Son and to us his disciples. As we reflect on the Gospel, and as we attend to all the growing things entrusted to our care, let us ask ourselves: How will I remain with Jesus this week so that all my actions will honor his Father and bear much fruit?