

We read in the gospels of the times when Jesus was joy-filled, and times when he was despondent and times when he was fearful— yet his feelings did not ever stop him from doing the will of God.

On that night when he spoke to them so intimately, did Jesus know that his disciples would abandon him when he needed their friendship the most? Maybe he didn't know exactly how they would – but, that they would was something that he likely suspected.

And on the night that he was going to be betrayed, abandoned and denied, by his friends, tried, tortured and killed by the religion and state - he spoke to his disciples about what it meant to be part of the vine – what it meant to be attached to the one whose life blood coursed through him...about what it meant to be part of the team together.

Last week Bryce read that passage – about the vine and the branches – today – a continuation:

**John 15:9-17**

<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me,  
so I have 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.

<sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,  
and that 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>No one has greater love than this,  
to lay down one's life for one's friends.

<sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you.

<sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer,  
because the servant does not know what the master is doing;  
but I have called you friends,  
because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

<sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you.  
And I appointed you to go and bear fruit,  
fruit that will last,  
so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

<sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

On the night that he was going to be betrayed, abandoned, and denied, by his friends, tried, tortured and killed by the religion and state - he spoke to his disciples about the kind of love that he had for God – and the kind of love that he had for them...

Said Jesus to his disciples, "I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. We have shared fully and freely."

This is the last will and testament between Jesus and his disciples. He makes it clear to the disciples that they are not servants--but friends. A servant does not know what his master is doing, as Jesus pointed out. Friends, on the other hand, good friends are open and honest with each other.

But most important of all, friends value each other's lives as much as they value their own. They are willing to lay their lives down for each other. And good friends love another even when one or all goof up.

Earlier in this passage, Christ reminds them that his prayer is not for them alone, but also for they who will come in future generations. That's us. This passage applies to us too – our relationship with Christ, and to each other.

We read in Scripture today that Christ has chosen us, asked that we be on his side, a member of his team. We didn't pick him. He sought us out, recruited us - as it were-- not by coercion, nor by conscription, but out of loving care, out of belief in us, out of concern that we get to know him, enjoy fellowship together, and become all we are capable of being. Even when we betray, deny, abandon, hide and doubt, we are still part of this team. Christ still calls us out...still chooses us.

And we are called to respond to God's gracious love towards us. We are called, chosen, and cherished by the One who created us. Called and chosen to be part of the vine – and to bear fruit together.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, and theologian who was killed resisting Hitler's Third Reich in 1945, described the church as "Christ taking form in a body of believers."

Scientists are realizing more and more every day that this world in which we exist is not a gigantic machine. Instead, it is a vital, dynamic, creative, ecological network of life that is producing and sustaining energy, pulsating among interrelating systems throughout the universe.

Our own brains are not one entity but millions of nerve cells cooperating, interrelating, communicating together to make us us – each in a unique and individual way. We are – the earth is a wonderful biological interrelation of things working together for the same purpose – that of sustaining life.

Similarly, the church – Menno, if we want to be specific, isn't so much a building or an institution with rules and regulations, rituals and traditions. And it is more than a bunch of random people with similar interests. It is more than an organization – it is an ORGANISM. A vital, dynamic, creative, network that is producing, and sustaining energy. It is a pulsating network of people who love God, seek to do God's will in their relationships with each other and in the world, who cherish each other, who treat others with dignity and honesty, gladly caring for others' needs and building bridges of reconciling and understanding and peace.

Dr. Peter Storey, who, in South Africa worked along with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and President Nelson Mandela in dismantling apartheid, says that "when we invite Christ into our lives, he insists that we let him bring his friends with him."

Jesus made it unmistakably clear that we cannot truly love him and not also love those he loves and those for whom he died. We must love even those we do not or cannot like, for Christ's sake. Its part of being the team – being chosen together to be part of the team.

Later, in chapter 17, when Christ prays for his disciples prior to going to the garden, prior to his betrayal and death, he prays to God for his followers to be **one**, even as he and the Father are **one**. He prays that we will love each other as he and his father love one another and us.

*This* love is extremely important today as conflict rages everywhere - across the earth, in our neighbourhoods and within these walls. When there is conflict in the vine – among our body – than it is vital that everyone on the vine work together towards hope, a mature faith and reconciling love.

The disciples didn't have it easy. Jesus called them chosen – friends – and yet after his resurrection they had to deal with what they did – or didn't do – when Jesus needed them most. And after his resurrection, Jesus forgave them and called them to continue to spread the good news of God's grace and love to the world – and to baptize.

Well, they did, and this caused some HUGE tension – and there were times when it seemed as though Christ's message of God's redeeming love would fall apart because the disciples argued amongst themselves.

Philip was baptizing eunuchs – totally against the Deuteronomistic law!

Peter and Paul was baptizing Gentiles – who weren't even circumcised so how could they be part of the chosen people?

On top of that, many new Christians were being tortured and killed by the Roman government unless they recanted their faith in the One true God.

Times such as these called for open minds, open hearts, and open doors. And they made it through stronger and with more hope.

And then there were centuries after when European Christians pulled at the vines – twisting scripture to mean what they wanted – twisting faith to guilt people to give money for fear that God would not forgive their sins unless they gave...

And then there were always those who asked questions – who were “troublemakers” – who said, “Wait, did Christ really say that?” And many martyrs later we've come to some kind of denominational truce.

And now – in our Western Euro-central world – we all want to be true, and we want to be right...and that can really really get in the way of spreading the good news of God's redemptive love and grace.

We too twist the vines and pluck the fruit if we deem it unworthy.

We didn't choose Christ – he chose us – and he chose those around us. God is the gardener and when we are attached to the vine we produce fruit together.

And when/if we don't produce good fruit, we are pruned by the gardener to focus our growth. You see our fruit is not our own. We are not doing our work. We're not even doing God's work. God is doing God's work through us, and the quality of the fruit we produce is determined by the health of our connection to the vine.

Jesus tells the disciples – right before they abandon him – that they are no longer servants – but now friends.

He says,

<sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer,  
because the servant does not know what the master is doing;  
but I have called you friends,  
because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

And he continues, knowing or suspecting what will come later that evening – yet knowing God's love for all God's children – even to the point of sacrifice. He says:

<sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you.  
Friends  
Chosen  
And appointed.

And I appointed you to go and bear fruit,  
fruit that will last,  
so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

Knowing that they would betray him, deny him, abandon him, Jesus still called them:  
Friends  
Chosen  
Appointed to bear good fruit  
Together

Why?

so that you may love one another.