

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER:  
THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES:  
Acts 9:26-31 & JOHN 15:1-8 MAY 2, 2021**

I part the First reading { Acts 9:26-31 } this Sundays says: *“When Saul (Paul) arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him.....Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and reported to them how Paul had seen the Lord.....”*

We possibly remember that Saul ( Paul) was a Zealot; The dictionary defines as Zealot as: *“a person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their religious, political, or other ideals.....”*

We can see therefore why the Apostles were skeptical of Paul joining their ranks. He was a zealous, murderous persecutor of the Christians. Paul was there at the stoning of Steven, so they remembered that and a genuine fear of him prevents them from allowing him to be part of the group he persecuted.

In this same first reading, we hear that Barnabas speaks up on Paul’s behalf and testifies to his conversion and his genuine discipleship. Imagine how different our church might be had Barnabas not bravely spoken on Paul's behalf! Would fear interfere with God's missionary plan for Paul? **Yes, Fear** was hanging over the apostles mind when they saw Paul as an unchanged person.

There is a reason that **"Be not afraid"** is one of the most commonly repeated phrases in the gospels, for living in fear is not God's plan for us. When we open ourselves up and stand in uncomfortable situations, when we risk an encounter with others who are different from ourselves, when we serve at the margins of the society and confront racism and sexism and homophobia, we are bearing the fruit of the Father. When we follow the example of Barnabas—speaking on behalf **of a former enemy—or be the Voice of the Voiceless**, we make room in our lives, in our church, in our world for the Spirit to work. We forge a connection to the True Vine that will bear much fruit.

In John's gospel today, Jesus identifies himself as the True Vine. When we remain connected to Jesus through love, we stay **close to the vine and bear much fruit.** When we become separated from that love, **when we become fearful** of the ways that the Spirit is calling us to work, **we bear no fruit.** Fear interferes with our union with Christ.

How does fear separate us from the love of God? When we live in fear, we allow our prejudices and judgments and insecurities to drive our decisions. We make decisions that we know will be safe and allow us to remain comfortable and secure, just by ourselves. So to be part of the Vine and bear fruits we have to get rid of the unnecessary fears that will prevent us from producing fruits.

In order to remain in Christ and bear fruits we need to ask ourselves a few questions: First, I think that it raises a question that we must all answer: Are we bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God. How can you tell a pear tree? By the fruit that it bears. How can you tell an apple tree? By the fruit that it bears. **How can you**

**tell a Christian. By the fruit that he/she bears? It is just as simple as that. The fruits of the vine are not church attendance, or Biblical knowledge, or your individual stewardship.** Even though all of those things are important, **the true fruit of the vine is a loving and compassionate life.** Sister and brothers, it all comes down to this how do you treat other people? That is simple and as direct as I can put it.

The issue again and again dear sisters and brothers; It is not how much knowledge you have or even necessarily how sincere you are. The issue is how do you treat people? If you are in Christ, people will be able to see the fruits of your life in terms of our compassion and love and attitude.

Secondly, in Jesus analogy, the farmer (God) is depicted as pruning out bad branches. We don't like to wrestle with that concept, because it implies that God cuts some people out. There is an element of judgement in it that we would just as soon not deal with. There are those who are quick to point out that Jesus was here specifically referring to the Jews. That is true. But we miss the point if we do not understand that this law of nature also applies to Christians.

Dead branches are not only non-productive, they pull the energy away from the vine and keep it from fruit bearing new branches. We like to think that there are various degrees of allegiance, but the truth is that in God's vineyard there are only two kinds of branches those that bring forth fruit, and those that do not. The former are cultivated, the latter are pruned. God blesses the lives of those persons who are productive for his Kingdom.

Thirdly, we must cultivate a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said: You must abide in me and my words in you. He is talking here about a relationship. As the fruit receives its nourishment from the vine, so too do we turn to Christ for our daily nourishment and growth. How tragic it is that so many today see their strength as being financial security, or peer respect, or their own creative ingenuity, or a host of other things. These things may feed us for a day or even for a season, but there comes a time when they will not bring the deep nourishment that we seek. For that we need God.