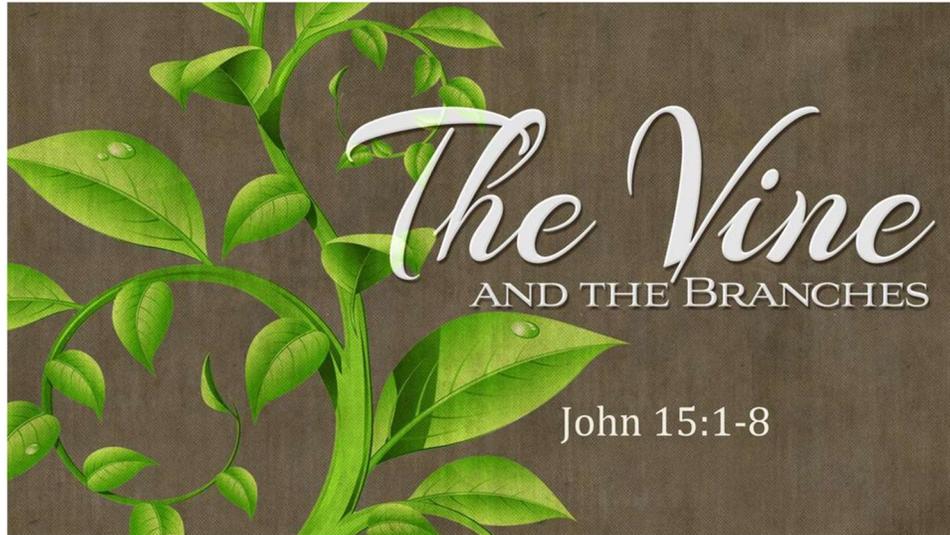


**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
WILLMAR, MN  
May 2, 2021 -5th Sunday of Easter**



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*\*Please rise as you are able*  
Please join in speaking/singing **bolded** text

**PRELUDE**

**WELCOME TO WORSHIP**

**PREPARING OUR HEARTS**

**\*Opening Words**

Wondrous Vinegrower, you make all things new in water and Word,  
feeding your people with love, joy and peace.  
Lead us today and every day to the font of new beginnings.  
Teach us to love what you have commanded  
and prune what does not nourish your creation,  
in the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, one God now and forever.  
Amen.

**\*Opening Hymn**

**“How Great is Our God”**

Text and Music by Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves, and Ed Cash  
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The splendor of the king, clothed in majesty,  
let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice  
He wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide  
and trembles at his voice and trembles at his voice

How great is our God, sing with me  
How great is our God, and all will see  
how great, how great is our God

Age to age he stands and time is in his hands  
beginning and the end beginning and the end  
The Godhead, three in one Father, Spirit, Son  
the Lion and the Lamb the Lion and the Lamb

How great is our God, sing with me  
How great is our God, and all will see  
how great, how great is our God

(You're the) name above all names  
(You are) worthy of all praise  
and my heart will sing, how great is our God.

How great is our God, sing with me  
How great is our God, and all will see  
how great, how great is our God  
(repeat)

### **Prayer of Confession**

*I am, you said, the true vine.*

And we are connected: your branches.  
At times, firm and strong, flourishing and fruiting with kindness and care;  
peaceful and patient. Rooted in love, watered with grace, tended with tenderness.

But Lord, at times we are barely clinging on,  
faltering and failing, wondering if you're there; rattled and restless.  
Wretched, alone - withered, joy gone, heavy with helplessness.

In the green times and the dry, still you remain.  
And so, connected, help us abide. Amen.

Beloved children of God, hear the good news:  
In Jesus Christ you are forgiven!

Let that love and grace claim you,  
and draw you back to the source of life and hope.

**Hymn**

**“Every Move I Make”**

Text and Music by Davis Ruis

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Every move I make, I make in you, you make me move Jesus  
Every breath I breathe in you (Woo-hoo!)  
Every step I take, I take in you, you are my way Jesus  
Every breath I take I breathe in you (Woo-hoo!)

Waves of mercy, waves of grace  
Everywhere I look, I see your face  
Your love has captured me  
Oh my God, this love, how can it be?  
How can it be, how can it be, how can it be? You tell me! (LET'S GO!)

LA LA LA-LA LA LA  
LA LA LA-LA LA LA  
LA LA LA-LA LA LA  
LA LA LA-LA LA LA

**THE WORD PROCLAIMED**

**Celebrating Clearwater Forest**

**“Sanctuary”**

Words & Music by John W. Thompson and Randy Skruggs  
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Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary  
Pure and holy, tried and true  
With thanksgiving I'll be a living sanctuary for you

I will call (echo)  
Upon the Lord (echo)  
Who is worthy (echo)  
To be praised (echo)  
So shall I be saved  
So shall I be saved  
So shall I be saved  
From my enemies

## Scripture Lesson

John 15:1-8

### Message

#### **“Digging In”**

**Rev. Leanne B. Thompson**

**May 2, 2021 - 5th Sunday in Easter**

I brought something with me today. These are cuttings from a couple of plants that live in our house. They are beautiful, thriving plants - thanks to Scott - and because they are thriving, they need to be pruned frequently. If we didn't regularly trim them back, they would take over our home. They grow so aggressively we have lovingly named them plantula and planthera. I don't actually remember which is which. But I can tell you what kind of plants they are because they possess some distinctive features that make them identifiable.



This branch comes from a Hoya. It is commonly called a wax plant, or a hindu rope, but its official name is Hoya. It is identifiable by its thick, waxy, curled-in, dark green leaves and its long woody vines.



This branch comes from a Pothos. It is a little bit more difficult to identify because it looks very similar to a Philodendron. It is identifiable by its smooth, green, slightly asymmetrical, heart-shaped leaves, and stems that match its leaves. It is missing the papery white cataphylls that are characteristic of the Philodendron, so that's how I know it's a Pothos (at least that is what the internet tells me).

Even though these branches have been cut away from the vine, we are able to identify them, because they resemble the plant from which they come. That is an important image I would like you to keep in mind as we consider this lesson from the gospel of John.

This story of *The Vine and the Branches* comes from a series of teachings that Jesus offers his disciples as he is preparing to leave them. He is getting them ready because he is going to go and he is planting seeds for them to understand how he is still present with them when he is no longer physically there. He taught them about his presence in the breaking of the bread, he gave them the comforting image as himself as the good shepherd, and in today's reading encouraging words about them - the branches - abiding in him - the true vine.

In Psalm 80 the psalmist compares Israel to a vine clipping taken from Egypt and planted in the land of Canaan, flourishing when the vine was living faithful to God,

but withering and trampled when straying from God's way. The prophet Isaiah speaks God's declaration concerning Israel when he proclaims, "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" Gathered with his closest disciples, Jesus claimed that image for himself: "I am the true vine...you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

Abide is a beautiful word. It suggests a deep connection, a resting in, a participation with. "Abide in me as I abide in you," Jesus tells his friends. Abide is more than simply being together. Jesus had been with his disciples day in and day out. They shared meals; they shared hot, dusty journeys; they shared stormy seas and crowded hillsides. What Jesus was inviting them to when he invited them to Abide together was something beyond that, something that transcended the sharing of physical space. He was inviting them to share his fundamental nature. He was preparing them for his departure, and preparing them for how they could be together in spite of his physical absence by being together in their very identity and nature.

It's like these plant cuttings. They share fundamental characteristics with the plant from which they were removed. They didn't become something different when they were cut away. They are still identifiable as distinct and unique plant species that share traits with the vine from which they were removed. They will be transplanted somewhere else; they won't share a pot with their parent plant, but this vine will never stop being a Hoya and this one will continue to be a Pothos.

"I am the vine," Jesus tells his followers, "and you are my branches." The disciples shared a close relationship with Jesus, they learned from him, they were shaped by him. More than that, they abide in one another. The fundamental characteristics of Jesus are now part of them, as Jesus took on the fundamental characteristics of human beings to be God with us.

Which leaves us all with a question to consider today: are we identifiable as branches of the true vine, Jesus Christ? When people look at us, do they see his characteristics displayed in our lives? His compassion? His mercy? His acceptance? His patience? His conviction? His inclusion of the marginalized? His love?

If our lives are not reflecting Jesus, it's possible we are abiding in something that is not him. We may have grafted ourselves to false teachings or fake news. We may be drawing our spiritual nutrients from a polluted well or contaminated soil. We may not be feeding our spiritual lives at all, completely disconnected from the source of life. Here is one simple check to measure the health of our branches: if we are not loving God and loving our neighbors we have strayed from the one true vine.

Here the invitation from Jesus again, my friends: “Abide in me as I abide in you.” May you find ways to dig in and connect, once again, to the love of Christ which is our source of hope, strength, and peace. May you know the love of Jesus that brings you in to be loved and send you out, branches transplanted in the world, to share the love of Jesus.

Alleluia! Amen.’

## **WE RESPOND TO THE WORD**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

For all the blessings of this life,  
we give thanks to You, Creator God.  
For families, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and strangers,  
who nurture us, that the love of God may grow within.  
That Your love, your Word, like a seed,  
may grow to produce in us, good fruit.

*May your love be like a seed, taking root and growing strong.*

For the leaders of various nations and cities,  
that they may lead with strong hearts and gentle hands and generous spirits,  
with compassion and mercy, with wisdom and grace.  
May they reflect your will guiding all their actions and decisions.

*May your love be like a seed, taking root and growing strong.*

For those who serve in harm's way,  
those who live in dangerous places,  
those who live in areas of war and strife,  
those who live in fear,  
those who worry about employment, bills, food,  
and struggle just to find dignity in life.  
May your grace bring peace and safety to all people, one to another.

*May your love be like a seed, taking root and growing strong.*

For those who suffer from any illness or dis-ease—  
of mind, body, or spirit.  
Restore these, and all those we carry in our hearts, to fullness of health—  
health as only you, O God, can bring.  
May your mercy shower each of us with healing mercy and love.

*May your love be like a seed, taking root and growing strong.*

For those who are dying, and for those who have died.  
Send forth your comforting love.  
Give solace to those who mourn.  
Console those who grieve.  
May your grace surround us  
like a mantle upon our heads,  
a shawl upon our shoulders,  
a hand, to hold our hand.

*May your love be like a seed, taking root and growing strong.*

By the blessing of your Spirit, help us to live as we pray so that the world may come to know the gift of life in Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

**Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today, our daily bread;  
forgive our sins and turn us from temptation.  
The kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever.  
Amen, amen, amen.**

### **Hymn of Affirmation**

#### **“Mighty to Save”**

Text and Music by Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding  
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Everyone needs compassion, a love that’s never failing, let mercy fall on me  
Everyone needs forgiveness, the kindness of a Savior, the hope of nations

Savior, he can move the mountains  
My God is mighty to save, he is mighty to save  
Forever, author of salvation

He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave

So take me as you find me, all my fears and failures, Lord, fill my life again  
I give you my life to follow, everything I believe in, now I surrender

Savior, he can move the mountains  
My God is mighty to save, he is mighty to save  
Forever, author of salvation  
He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave

Shine your light and let the whole world see, we’re singing  
for the glory of the risen King, Jesus

(repeat)

Savior, he can move the mountains  
My God is mighty to save, he is mighty to save  
Forever, author of salvation  
He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave

### **Invitation to the Offering**

Offering what we have for the sake of others is a discipline of pruning -  
letting go of our possessions, our time, and even ourselves -  
to extend the gospel witness into the world.

Be generous in your ministry of giving.  
You need not fear; you abide in the vine.

### **Offering Prayer**

Through our offerings, O God,  
give your loving Spirit to a world in need of comfort.  
Make our many gifts one offering for the world;  
in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Celebration of Holy Communion**

#### **Invitation**

We gather at the table - not just this table,  
but the tables everywhere in the world where the faithful gather in Christ's name.

We come from many places,  
differing in age, differing in race,  
differing in orientation, politics and even religion.

As we come together around the table  
we discover that our differences are not something we tolerate  
but that our differences are indeed a blessing,  
the more difference we bring, the more fully we experience  
the presence of the sacred in our midst.

So come, children of God, just as you are.  
Wherever you are on this journey of life, you are welcome here,  
here in this place, here in this community, here at this table

This is not a Presbyterian table, it is the Lord's table.  
Come, children of God, come and remember with us.

#### **Remembrance**

We remember the stories that Jesus' friends tell,  
stories of bread broken and shared, feeding a multitude,  
stories of being gathered together, enemy and friend, around tables,  
stories of unlikely guests revealing the face of the sacred.

They say that that  
it was on a night of both celebration and betrayal  
that he took the bread leftover on the table,  
blessed it and broke it;  
reminding them that it is  
in the breaking that we become whole,  
in losing our lives that we find them,  
in serving that we are served.  
“Take and Eat” he said to them, “This is my body broken for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”  
As the grain scattered becomes one in the loaf,  
when we eat this bread, we become one with one another.

They say that he took the cup also leftover on the table,  
blessed it and shared it,  
remembering with them, the life-giving breath  
even now pounding a rhythm through our veins,  
the breath of life from whence we come  
the breath that precedes and follows all that we can see  
“This,” he told them, “is the cup of the new covenant sealed in my blood for the  
forgiveness of sins. Take and drink in remembrance of me.”  
As the grapes find life in the vine,  
when we drink this cup,  
we become at one with the source of life itself.

### **Blessing**

And so we pray:  
Come, holy Spirit, come.  
Bless this bread and  
bless this fruit of the vine.  
Bless all of us in our eating and drinking that our eyes might be open,  
that we might recognize the risen Christ in our midst,  
indeed in one another.  
Come, holy Spirit, come.

### **Sharing the Feast**

Bread: this is the bread of life.  
Cup: this is the cup of salvation.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

Holy, gracious, God,  
Here at this table your promise of life is made tangible.  
**We have rested in the depth of your love;**

**We have tasted your nourishing, nurturing presence;  
We accept you into our bodies, into our lives.  
Together, at this table, you have offered us life.  
Together, by your grace, we accept the life you offer.  
And we give you thanks.**

## **WE LEAVE TO SERVE**

### **Closing Hymn**

#### **“Trading My Sorrows”**

Text and Music by Darrell Evans  
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I’m trading my sorrows, I’m trading my shame  
I’m laying them down for the joy of the Lord  
I’m trading my sickness, I’m trading my pain  
I’m laying them down for the joy of the Lord

Yes Lord, Yes Lord, Yes, Yes Lord!  
Yes Lord, Yes Lord, Yes, Yes Lord!  
Yes Lord, Yes Lord, Yes, Yes Lord! Amen!

I’m pressed but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned,  
struck down but not destroyed  
I am blessed beyond this curse for his promise will endure that  
His joy’s gonna be my strength  
Though this sorrow may last through the night, his joy comes in the morning

### **Charge**

Go out with joy that you have been fed and healed,  
securely abiding as branches of the true vine.  
The blessing of Almighty God be upon you today and always.  
Amen.

### **Benediction**

#### **“The Blessing”**

words and music by Chris Brown, Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe, and Steven Furtick  
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Music by Elevation Worship Publishing  
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The Lord bless you and keep you,  
Make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

(repeat)

Amen, amen, amen. Amen, amen, amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you,  
Make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

**POSTLUDE**