

March 19  
Lesson 3: John 15: 1-17  
God's Love Manifested

**Context:**

The scripture reading for this week comes the Gospel of John. From chapters fourteen through seventeen, we have one of the longest discourses of Jesus. The setting of the chapter is set in Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover feast.<sup>1</sup> Most scholars term this as the Farewell Discourse as the following chapters will have Jesus betrayed, tortured, and hung on the cross. So as it goes, these are his final words and instructions given to his disciples so that they may carry on.

In the section we have today, we see Jesus using metaphors and then giving instructions to follow. The first part of chapter fifteen has Jesus using one of his "I am" statements to declare who he is in relationship to the people. Fitting with the agricultural aspect of his context, Jesus starts of this section saying that he is the vine and that his Father is the vineyard keeper. Jesus goes on to say that he is a vine that has been pruned and trimmed so that he is the vine that produces the fruit for the harvest. He goes on to say that the disciples are the branches. If they stay connected to him as the vine, then they will produce fruit and flourish. If they do not stay connected and fall off, then the branch dries up and falls to the ground to be burned in the chaff. Everything works when the branches stay connected to the vine and fruit flourishes. The same goes with the disciples; if they stay rooted in Christ they will produce fruit in their lives.

The second part is the application part of the metaphor. Jesus ties everything back to love saying that if they remain in him, the fruit they will bear will be that of love. Intimate friendship will occur because all the parties involved will love another. Jesus goes on to express that the disciples are to love one another because that is what Jesus did. He did not see them as servants, but as friends that care for one another. Friends love one another and seek to be there for one another. Jesus then makes it a point to say that he chose them so they could produce fruit in their own lives and that it would last. All the commandments he has given are so that they can love one another and continue to produce fruit.

In the Johannine community that is addressed, this Gospel text would have helped them greatly to carry on the faith and to care for one another. With all the tension and different challenges facing the early church, this discourse would have helped them to see the interdependency they were to have on one another. They would have been reminded that their relationship with Jesus was to be modeled in the way that treated and saw one another. If the church was going to continue, it would do so because they were motivated to love one another just as Jesus loved them.

**Application:**

I have always loved how Jesus describes himself as a vine and his disciples as the branches who produce fruit with their lives. It is a beautiful analogy and one that should help us understand who we are in Christ. If Jesus is our vine, then we will be branches that produce fruit in the way we lead our lives. And the fruit we produce is pure, simple

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Sloyan, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching – John*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 165.

love.

As I serve a rural context and grew up in a rural context, I have learned a lot about farming. One thing that never ceases to amaze me is the amount of time and energy it takes to take care of crops so that there will be an abundant harvest. Many of my church members who own farms tell me of how much time it takes to plant, to nurture, and to harvest the crops. They pour so much of themselves in the fields with early mornings and late evenings. They spend countless hours thinking of innovative ways to produce more and even calculating costs so that their produce is fairly priced. And the part that amazes me the most is that they strive to keep Sabbath so that they can worship on Sundays. And when you ask them why that it is so, they say: "This is the Lord's Day and we set aside this day to hear God's Word and give thanks for our blessings." No matter what season, they are there. Even when the crops may be in peril or they have an overabundance and much to harvest, they are there on most Sunday mornings. And some days I wake to find a basket of peaches on my doorstep with no note attached, but I have my suspicions as to who put them there.

These experiences have helped me understand this passage so much more clearly. Just as God nurtures us, we begin to bloom and grow. The more we learn about God and live out the teachings that Jesus gave us, the more we see fruit in our lives. We see people experiencing God's love and we see that we have been given a commission to share lives with others. But we have to stay rooted in God: attending worship, receiving Holy Communion, studying the scriptures, going to God in prayer, and keeping Sabbath. With those practices in place, we grow and God uses us to do amazing things and we grow in awareness of how we are to be disciples. We see that as we stay connected to Jesus and depend on him, we grow and produce fruit in our lives. And that includes loving others just as Jesus loves us.

I think one of the things that I enjoy the most about serving small membership churches and rural contexts is that one learns a lot about love and the simple goodness that comes from when we take care of another. It does not take fancy degrees from prestigious schools, the commentaries of scholars, or numerous accolades to understand the simplicity of Jesus's commandment to love each other just as I have loved you. It involves understanding that love is a verb; it is something that you do. There are no caveats to Jesus' words and there are no exclusive terms of who we are to love. When you're rooted in God, you love others because Jesus commanded you to do so. Which may mean simply putting a basket of peaches on your neighbor's doorstep.

Grace and peace,  
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