

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“On-Line with our Life-Line”**

John 15:1 – 8

First Communion Sunday

May 3, 2015

If you had paid a visit to our home in Ashland, Ohio, ten years ago, one of the things you would've quickly noticed was the large number of grapevine wreaths which bedecked the premises. The previous owners had made these wreaths a prominent feature of the backyard décor... and when we bought the house, we decided that they looked pretty good, and we left them alone.

So, we had more than a dozen of these grapevine wreaths on display... hanging on fences, and attached to tree trunks, and posted on the door leading from the patio into the house. There were big ones, small ones, simple ones, intricate ones. One of them had this little fake bird, nestling among the vines; another was festooned with a variety of twines and ribbons. Several of them had been hanging outside for years... so they looked really old and weathered. Eventually, Sylvia herself got into the grapevine spirit... and she hung a very nice one over the sofa in our living room; and another one over the headboard in our bedroom. I think there might have even been one in our guest bathroom.

Anyway, the point is, there were few places you could go, inside or outside of that house, where you would be out of sight of some grapevine wreath or other. They were everywhere. And, aside from being pretty, the one thing that all of these various and assorted grapevine wreaths had in common was this: every single one of them was dead. As in... *dead!* They were dry; they were lifeless; they were barren; they were practically petrified. They might have been beautiful in their decorative sort of way; but, nevertheless, they were absolutely, positively... dead.

At one time those vines had been green; full of growth and life; nourishing the succulent fruit which sprung forth from them. But now they were brown; and decaying; and nourishing nothing beyond the eyesight of those who stood at a distance admiring their brittle beauty. These particular grapevines may have been good for making decorations, or starting a bonfire; but they weren't good for anything else... and certainly not for growing grapes.

And why were these formerly healthy and productive vines now good for nearly nothing? Well, because they'd been *cut off* from the main vine which had been the source of their sustenance. As long as they'd been connected to the main network of life-giving roots, and moisture, and nutrients... they were alive, and productive, and healthy. But once that connection was severed... there was nothing else for them to do but to wither, and die, and become decorations. Decorations which, as far as I know, are still hanging, immobile, on the fences and trees of that yard in Ashland, Ohio.

I always think about our collection of grapevine wreaths, whenever I read the text that we shared this morning, in our lesson from the Gospel of John... in which Jesus, speaking to His disciples shortly before His arrest and crucifixion, reminded them that they, too, were very much

like a group of grapevines. Not in a physical sense, of course... but in a spiritual sense. According to Jesus, as a grapevine must be attached to the main branch in order to stay alive... it's as our hearts and minds remain firmly attached to **Him**, to His grace and wisdom and power, that our **faith** stays alive; and that **we** stay alive, as growing and productive Christian disciples.

Apart from His love; cut off from His grace; disconnected from His power; we are as spiritually useless as one of those grapevine wreaths hanging in my yard in Ohio. We may look good, and people may admire us, and we may go through all the motions of some kind of religious conviction; but on the inside, in our hearts and souls, we'll be dry, and lifeless, and stuck in the mother of all ruts as we spin our wheels in a faith-life that gets us nowhere.

And so Jesus reminds His disciples, and He reminds us, that we need to stay connected **to Him**; He reminds us that we need to be guided, and inspired, and directed **by Him**; He encourages us to remember that, **with Him** as our constant source of strength, and hope, and meaning, and peace... we will always have a life that makes a difference, even on those days when we're feeling dry, and frazzled, and worn to a nub. Listen again to what He tells His disciples:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you will and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

That's just about the clearest, most easily understood teaching that our Lord ever gave us: in order to have a healthy spiritual life, we need to be connected to the Source of our spiritual life! In order to grow, in our faith, in our discipleship... we need to be attached to the One who **gives** us faith, and who makes our discipleship possible. In order to live a healthy and difference-making Christian life, it's not just a matter of what we believe; it's not just a matter of how we act; and it's not just a matter of where we go to church. It's also a matter of staying open, in here... and up here... to the presence, and the power, and the love of our Lord.

If we do that... we'll never have to worry about turning into spiritual versions of those ever-popular grapevine wreaths! And we **will** bear much fruit, for the sake of our Father's kingdom.

As we approach this communion table in a few minutes, that's one of the most important things that we need to keep in mind: that we are attached, like branches, to the Vine that gives us life and hope. That's the lesson that I want our young First Communion kids to remember today: that as you receive the Lord's Supper, you are being reminded of what Jesus has done for you... **and** of your connection to Him; that will last for the rest of your lives, and forever!

To put it in modern, technological language: when we share communion, we remember that we are "on-line with our life-line." And Jesus has promised that, as long as we make it our quest to be on-line with Him... He will never let us down; He will never let that connection be broken.

May that be our quest; and like good branches, may we always stay attached to the Lord and Savior who is the source of all we have and cherish! In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!