



The Reverend Emily Williams Guffey, Rector
Sermon - May 2, 2021
5th Sunday of Easter, Year B
John 15:1-8

We were sitting together at dinner the night before everything changed.

Our glasses were brimming with this exquisite red wine, oh, a mere sip of which brought deep, sated smiles to our faces. I'll tell you, it tasted of joy; it tasted like the abundant complexity of earth; it tasted like anything was possible. It was good.

We were still grazing on the flatbread - I remember it warm in my hands - and the cool, piquant herbs and vegetables, and the fish, when he started to say he would be leaving. And not just moving: leaving. Our time together was coming to an end.

But also it wasn't, he tried to explain. It was confusing; he had a lot of words. We all were trying to keep up, but, I'll tell you, our heads were swirling.

Then, I remember, he paused and beamed one of his luminous grins that told us that more was coming, and it was good, if only we could understand.

"I am," he began, and I could hear one of his koans coming. He was the bread of life, he had told us.¹ He was the light of the world.² He was the good shepherd.³ He tried so frequently to draw us beyond our imagination, and we would chew - we would feast - on his words, for years to come.

"I am," he began, and, searching, gestured at the wine. "I am the true vine," he said.

This sounded positive, but what he said next....I still think about it, I still live on it. He said, "You are the branches. Abide in me, as I already and always will abide in you."

It was, and is still, a lot to process, yet I remember that night immediately feeling lighter. I was mystified, of course, but hopeful. His words comforted me, beyond words.

Jesus was telling us that he was leaving, that he would die soon, yet, that we would remain together and that, even, in this mystery of which we're all a part we would be closer, more intimate, than before, as close as a

¹ John 6:35,48,51

² John 8:12, 9:5

³ John 10:11,14

vine and its branches: the same essence. We would continue to learn from him, draw from him; we would be near him and with him, and he with us.

I also realized that night, that if he were a vine, then he would have to be living. Vines are living, right? Jesus, a vine, of all things: still changing water--and earth, and air, and sun--into wine.⁴ Still bringing joy, like at that wedding in Cana.⁵ Still gathering the earthly to the heavenly, the finite to the infinite, the modest to the abundant. Still transforming.

This news was so good, I can still taste it.

And it is true. It is real.

Jesus did die, and yet Jesus lives. His joy - true joy - is no stranger to loss or pain. His joy comes out of death, even death. I'm here today to tell you, and I want you to tell others, that there is no sorrow, confusion, no isolation, no agony, no fear, no loss that we could feel - and I know, we do feel it - that he has not already felt. He has been there. And it is not the end.

Jesus does abide with us. How did he put it? He makes his home in us, and we in him.⁶

He is the living vine, and we are blessed to be branches, taking what we have--mere water and earth, our fear and fatigue, heat and hope--dwelling together and bearing great joy.

⁴ Sam Wells, sermon discussion on John 15:1-8, April 27, 2021

⁵ John 2:1-11

⁶ John 15:4, *The Message* translation, Eugene Peterson