Easter 5B 2021 Staying Connected to Christ brings the Joyous Life

John 15: 1 – 8 1 John 4: 1 – 11 (12-21) Acts 8: 26 - 40

Collect: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The one place that any Christian cannot follow Jesus is to His cross. The cross is the ultimate altar in the heavenly place that demanded a perfect sacrifice. Not one of us is worthy, only the Paschal Lamb is worthy to be slain for the Life of the world.

That’s why Jesus said to his disciples that where He is going, they cannot come. Yet He declares that as a branch is **connected** to a vine, so are his disciples connected to Him! He goes so far to say that if anyone does not stay **connected** to Him, they are like dead branches because they are severed from the vine. These dead branches will be gathered to be thrown into the fire and burned.

What are we to make of this? How can the apostles not be with the Lord at His death yet be connected to Him in His Life? Reason and logic declare this to be a paradox. They warn that two opposites cannot be true. But we confess that Jesus cannot lie.

The tension of this paradox doesn’t need to be resolved. We need to be forgiven. Forgiveness is brought to us by the word of Christ. As He said to the fearful apostles: *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you,* He speaks to you at the baptismal font, in the Absolution and at his banquet table of the holy altar*.*

Jesus declares us clean because he took our un-cleanness to the cross. He drank the bitter cup of wrath so that He can give us the cup of peace in His sacred blood. He carried His cross alone so that peace was made in the heavens and remains open for all forgiven sinners.

We did not stumble across this on our own. Our darkened intellect could never invent such a thing. But the God of our salvation removed the ancient veil that hid his glory and opened our eyes to see His greatest glory in the cross.

Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; … Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! (Ps 150)

This is why we prayed in today’s collect that God made the minds of His faithful to be of one will. The one-ness of the church is already found in the body of Christ on His cross. Out of His sacred wound poured forth water and blood that connects us to Him and to one another.

This is not our doing. Too long have we believed the lie that the church is made up of people who gathered themselves together by agreeing that they have something to offer. Too long have we been enslaved by the burden that we are keeping the same church afloat against stormy wind and wave.

This lie leads to both pride and despair in Christians. It is seen in our boasting that our efforts have built churches and continues to finance them. It is seen in our despair that we are no match against the power of evil all around us.

All such lies spoken in God’s name **disconnect** us from Christ. The father of lies blinds us to the Truth. If we continue down that path, it will tear us from the vine. Severed from Christ we will wither and die. Withered and dead branches are only good for burning. Lord have mercy!

The vine was originally symbolized as the nation of Israel. Israel was supposed to be the people of God that loved what God commanded and desired what He promised. Israel did the opposite. It rejected the Messiah. Israel hated what God commanded and despised God’s enfleshed Promise in Jesus, the Messiah.

When God looked for it to yield grapes, only wild ones appeared. (Isaiah 5:2) God said (Jeremiah 2:21) *I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild one?*

Are we any less degenerate and wild? How can we love God’s commandments when we don’t even know them? How can we desire what He promises amidst our own desires that cannot save us in the hour of death?

Lord have mercy!

Only by His word are we clean! By His promise we remain connected to Christ! The Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized into Christ and remained so as he travelled home. He was not alone. He was forgiven. The Holy Spirit who brought Philip to him is the same Spirit who opened his eyes to see Jesus as God’s suffering servant. Jesus is the Lamb slaughtered, taken away from the earth, yet takes his sacred blood into the heavens and makes peace!

So are we not forsaken in our days of social isolation. Our peace is still found in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit has fixed your hearts in Christ Jesus. He is your first Love and your eternal Joy!

By the grace of God, you remain connected to him. You are his branch, grafted into His body at your baptism and nourished daily by His word.

The devil cannot sever you from Christ. He has no pruning shears in hand. He can only speak lies in your ears. Only the father has pruning shears. His never cuts off a branch that has the fruit of faith. God only prunes the branches where faith abounds so that it can have even more fruit and life.

Only the branch that has no faith is taken away. It is already dead. For Christ is Life. Severed from him is death. But for his forgiven saints, whose hearts are overjoyed in his Love, there is no more death.

Even when God is at work to prune us. Cutting always hurts. Yet the Father seeks to produce more fruit in us, which means more faith, more Jesus, more grace! So instead of feeling abandoned and forsaken when you love God’s commandments and want more Jesus, God, the master Gardener is at work in you to produce more faith, more fruit. For the finest juice of the grapevine, makes the wine of gladness, that picks up the cross and carries it with Joy! Stay connected to Christ and you will have Joy now and forever! He is Risen nevermore to die and so you live with Him!

Omologeo – to assure, to promise, to admit, to concede

Mt 14:7 Lk 22:6 Ac.7:17

-judicially “to make a statement”, in a legal sense “to bear witness”.

Most important in the NT tradition. Lk 12:8 Mt 10:32

* “to make solemn statements of faith”, “to confess something in faith”.

Rm 10:9-10 (expounding Dt 30:14) Paul refers to connection between confession and faith.

p210 arneisthai is here used to express the disputing of a Christological tenet, whereas omologein denotes the acceptance and proclamation of a specific anti-heretical theses. He who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar; he who denies the Father and the Son is antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22). We have before us a didactic style which defines and distinguishes afresh the terms pseustes and antichristos in the concrete contemporary situation of the community. These theses, fashioned in the conflict with Gnosticism and Judaism, presuppose a specific Christological understanding, while arneisthai is the contesting of an acknowledged ecclesiastical truth. According to 1 Jn. 4:2f the spirits must be tested whether they are from God or not, cf. 1 C. 12:3. Only the spirit which affirms the Christological truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. But the spirit which does not confess Jesus (pan pneuma o me omologei ton Iesoun) is not from God. In these Johannine theses we obviously have a solemn proclamatory statement: they seek to express a specific truth, the only possible relation to Christ. The anti-heretical understanding of omologein is very closely linked with the cultic and liturgical understanding. 1 Jn. 4:15 shows that these kerygmatic statements are in no sense to be taken intellectualistically. Only he who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has true fellowship with God. 2Jn. 7ff (outos estin ..) as well as 1 Jn. 2:22f shows that Jn. Defines both men and concepts in a fixed way. It is stated apocalyptically in 2 Jn. 7 that false teachers who do not accept the Christological kerygma (oi me omologountes) have gone forth. Omologia then, has divisive power. Jn. Is not seeking to define a specific doctrine dogmatically, but by a firm formulation of the kerygma to overcome the error of false teaching, to bring the opponent to decision, and so to proclaim the old truth in a new situation that its full saving significance is expressed. The real point in the act of confession is the whole truth attested in individual confessional formula. Though confession divides and distinguishes as solemn proclamation, it is still praise and acknowledgment of the work of Christ; it does not express the self-assertion of the Church. Confessions in the anti-heretical liturgical sense are new only in form. In substance they are still concrete ecclesiastical truth unfolded in solemn proclamation. …

Confession is often the answer to a question. Thus in baptism it is a reply to the question put by the minister. In the teaching conversation between Jesus and the disciples recorded in Mt 16:13-20 (which does not contain the liturgical and confessional omologein) Jesus Himself is the questioner. …

It must be conceded, of course, that knowledge of the message does not as such include genuine confession (Mt 10:19; Jn 12:42), and indeed that true confession is no protection against future denial. (footnote – this is taught not merely by the story of Peter in the NT but also by the history of the Church in times of special trial.) … Behind every act of confession stands Christ Himself as the true Witness (Rev. 1:5) who as the prototype of history, the bearer of God’s Spirit, and the eschatological Witness and Judge, sustains the community’s confession.

New insights are yielded by the very fact that primitive Christian proclamation (kerygma) and teaching (didache) are described and depicted as confession (omologein) and witnessing (marturein). …

John 15: 1 – 8 word of judgment, Father alone prunes. We are not the vinedressers or determine what good fruit is.

If we are not connected to Christ means you are lost. Every branch that does bear fruit is further pruned. So much for the prosperity gospel and for our despair when cross-bearing.

Only connected to Christ can we bear fruit. Disconnected we are dead. Fit to be burned.

How are we connected to Christ?

What is the good fruit that his branches bear?

Eunuch still connected to Christ through baptism.

Disconnected from Christ by a heretical spirit and confession.

Great collect for our changing times!

Luther: Christ is dialoguing with his disciples on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane and preparing them for martyrdom. As it goes with the vine so it goes with the branches in this world. While the pruning and fertilizing is unpleasant, it produces much fruit in the kingdom of God. The vine may wonder why the vinedresser is coming at him with axe and cow dung, yet when dressed the vine produces the sweetest juice and makes good wine. Here we are taught to view the tribulation and suffering of Christians in a different light other than how it feels and how the world looks at it. It does not happen without divine counsel (Rath) and will or a sign of God’s wrath and punishment, but from grace and fatherly love, and serves us in the best way.

It is an art to believe and hold for true and certain that what hurts and saddens us, is not to be called Pain or Suffering but for our benefit and piety. Just as the vine sees the gardener approaching with hoe or axe and does not say “What are you doing?” “Why do you take my branches away and rip at me with iron teeth and take away soil from me?” and the vinedresser responds: You fool, don’t you realize the branches I cut are draining you from nutrients and water and the cow dung I bring is for your benefit?”

This is how Christ sees his own suffering and that of his Christians in the world: that it is not to inflict pain