

May 2, 2021

“Staying Connected”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Sermon “Staying Connected”

I am always deeply moved by this scripture because it speaks to something close to my heart, that living the life that God intends for us is to remain connected to the divine and that God abides in us and we abide in God. Isn't that beautiful?

What's so exciting to me is that as we learn more about the universe, the reality that we move and breathe and have our being in, the more we learn about the infinite galaxies out there and the infinitude in quantum theory of subatomic particles. Science has proven what theologians and mystics have been saying all along that everything is connected.

The great Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen said in the 1100's, “That everything that is in the heavens, on Earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness”. I want to read to you an adapted article by Jean Houston that will explain this point further, called “Mr. Tayer”

She writes “When I was about fourteen I was seized by enormous waves of grief over my parents' breakup. I had read somewhere that running would help you cope with grief, so I began to run to school every day down Park Avenue in New York City.

I was a great big overgrown girl (5 feet eleven by the age of eleven) and one day I ran into a rather frail, old gentleman in his seventies and knocked the wind out of him. He laughed as I helped him to his feet and asked me in French- accented speech, “are you planning to run like that for the rest of your life?”

“Yes, sir” I replied. “It looks that way.”

“Well, Bon Voyage!” he said.

“Bon Voyage!” I answered and sped on my way.

About a week later I was walking down Park Avenue with my little fox terrier, Champ, and again I met the old gentleman. “Ah.” he greeted me, “my friend the runner, and with a fox terrier. Where are you going?” “Well, sir.” I replied, “I’m taking Champ to Central Park.”

“I will go with you.” he informed me. “I will take my constitutional.” And thereafter, for about a year or so, the old gentleman and I would meet and walk together. He had a long French name but asked me to call him by the first part of it, which was “Mr. Tayer”.

The walks were magical and full of delight, not only did he seem to have no self-consciousness, he was always being seized by wonder and astonishment over the simplest things. He was constantly and literally falling into love with everything, all the time.

I remember one time when he suddenly fell on his knees, and exclaimed to me, “Jeanne, look at the caterpillar!” I joined him on the ground to see what he was talking about “How beautiful it is”, he remarked, “this little green, fuzzy, being with wonderful funny, little, feet on the road to metamorphosis.” He then regarded me with equal delight and said “Jeanne, can you feel yourself to be a caterpillar?”

“Oh yes.” I replied with the baleful knowing of a gangly, pimply faced teenager. “Then think of your own metamorphosis.” he suggested. “What will you be when you become a butterfly? What is the butterfly of Jeanne?”

Or there was the time when a strong wind suddenly whipped through Central Park, and he told me, “Jeanne, sniff the wind.” I joined him in taking great gulps of wind. “This is the same wind sniffed by Jesus Christ (sniff), by Alexander the Great (sniff), by Joan dArc. (Sniff) be filled with the winds of history.”

It was wonderful. People of all ages followed us around, laughing—not at us but with us. He was truly present to every moment and being with him was like being in attendance at God’s own party, a continuous celebration of life and its mysteries.

But mostly he was so full of a vital sap that seemed to flow from everything. He always saw the interconnections between things—the way that everything in the universe, from fox terriers to tree bark to somebody’s red hat, to the mind of God, was related to everything else and it was all very, very good.

She wrote “I was constantly seized by astonishment in the presence of this infinitely beautiful man, who radiated such sweetness, such kindness. Many years later she would discover that Mr. Tayer was Teilhard de Chardon, the great priest, scientist, physicist, theologian. poet, and mystic. He wrote about love being the evolutionary force, the omega point, that lures the world and ourselves into becoming, because he experienced that love in a piece of rock, in the wag of a dog’s tail, in the eyes of a child.

He was so in love with everything that he talked in great particularity about the desire atoms have for each other, the yearning of molecules, of organisms, of bodies, of planets, of galaxies, all of creation longing for that radiant bonding, for joining, for the deepening of their condition, for becoming MORE, by virtue of yearning for and finding the other. His model for this connectedness was Jesus Christ.

What would the world be like if we could find a way to live in this knowledge of all of us being connected to God and to each other and to the Earth like that grapevine? Would we take better care of our planet? Would we feel more connected to people suffering in far away places, more connected to people suffering in our own community?

Would we actually listen deeper to others, have more empathy for others? Would we be more willing to accept love and encouragement from one another and from God? The implications are endless when we think about God abiding in everything, everyone, everywhere.

I remember, and I bet many of you have a time you remember, what it is like to try and live outside of God, cut off, claiming not to need anyone. I don't know about you but I definitely shriveled up. I know for a fact and through personal experience that I am nothing without God and all that I am is because of God.

Our culture suffers from this rugged individualism. To try and live separately from the vine, and independently from each other, emphasizing our differences and claiming superiority rather than celebrating our connections. Revel in our vitality that comes from God, our connection to God and to each other. Christ modeled for us a very different reality, *we are all neighbors on the same vine and God is the very life force that runs through us.*

I leave you with my favorite quote from Chardon, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." AMEN and AMEN

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same vine and God is the very life
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-- Rev. Susan Drake



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