

# Fifth Sunday of Easter, Gospel Year B

## Vine from the Ashes

John 15:1-8

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Chris Repp

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."*

**Author's Note:** For a more straightforward approach to this text, see my 2012 analysis [HERE](#):

**DIAGNOSIS: Inglorious**



***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Fruitless (Loveless)***

God is glorified (gets a good reputation) by our bearing fruit. This is my point of departure for this text this time around. We learn what Jesus means by bearing fruit later in this chapter, in the text for the following Sunday. Love for one another is the fruit that we are meant to bear (John 15:12). Jesus mentioned earlier (John 13:35) that loving one another is the sign that we are his disciples, and we teach this to our children in Sunday School. "They'll know we are Christians by our love," we sing.

But, in fact, we don't bear that fruit. These days Christians are known for not loving one another and the world God loves, but for our intolerance of people who are different from us. We are known for attempting to impose our cultural norms and assumptions on the society at large, for pitting faith against science, for indulging all manner of conspiracy theories, and for crying "persecution!" when our behaviors and attitudes are

challenged.

### ***Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) Withered***

We don't bear the fruit of loving one another because we are too busy focusing on ourselves, on our "success," our happiness, and our security. Others we see mostly as competitors or threats, when we think about them at all, or at best, as none of our business. The last thing we want is to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. And we treat God only as a means to our ends—our team's mascot, our "virtue signal," and the aider and abettor of our personal agendas—as if God were a genie in a lamp whose only purpose was to grant us wishes. We do not abide the sacrificial love of Jesus or his deferring to the will of the Father, and so we do not abide in him either.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): On the Burn Pile**

It would be bad enough if we alone bore the reproach for our selfishness. But in waving our "Team God" banners we advertise that God approves of our agendas, that God blesses our parochial, self-promoting, self-serving ways. This is false advertising that gives God a bad name. In bygone times we'd call it blasphemy. We betray God and God's life-giving mission. Our bad example makes God out to be at best a delusion, at worst an agent of evil. We have proven to be no better than dried up branches, good only for the burn pile.

**PROGNOSIS:**

**Glorious**



#### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Up from the Ashes***

Jesus too was thrown onto the burn pile, himself condemned for blasphemy. This is where he meets us, bearing what is in fact our sin. But God will not let the burn pile be his end, or ours. God means to be glorified, not because God needs our adoration, but because we need the light of life to be led out of the darkness of death (see John 1:1-14, 3:19-21). And so Jesus is raised up from the ashes, a resurrected vine emerging from the vineyard's scorched earth, a dazzling light, shining in the darkness. God's own glory.

#### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Connected***

Drawn by the glory of the true vine, trusting in the promise of the life he gives, we are grafted into him by faith, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Once attached, our lives are filled with his life, and we become conduits of his life for the sake of the world, our lives opened to our sisters and brothers. And the

vine grower tends to us, pruning us with word and sacrament to keep the connection strong and the life flowing.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Fruitful (Loving)***

“Glorious now, we press toward glory, and our lives our hopes confess” (Martin H. Franzmann, “Thy Strong Word,” Evangelical Lutheran Worship, # 511). Because we abide in the vine and are filled with his life, we bear fruit. We can’t help it. Nor would we want it any other way. With time and persistence, we surprise our former detractors with love that is genuine, humble, and kind. And God is glorified, for the sake of the world.