

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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ROOT AND BRANCH

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Text of a Sermon preached on the Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

ACTS 8:26-40 | PSALM 22:24-30

I JOHN 4:7-21 | JOHN 15:1-8

Once again, the miracle of spring is upon us. The world has turned green. The air is so full of pollen seeking new adventures that at times even those of us without allergies look and see the sandstorms, the microbursts of genetic material sending messages to new soldiers waiting in the field. The first flowering of every plant announces more to come. And in these beginnings, sometimes we anticipate the end of the cycle. As spring begins, I never fail to think of the end of summer - the fruit to come in the months ahead. But first this. We have to get the process going.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to us, to take on our nature, to establish an unbreakable bond, an organic connection that transforms life itself. As 1 John says: “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.”

Every year the universe takes a seed, puts it in a little dirt, encases it in another dormant bud, adds a little water and sunlight, and voila, a miracle. Every year, as we think about how we too are part of this mystery of life, we can wake up to God’s hope for us. As human beings, what breaks us down, and remakes us, takes dirt, water and sunlight, but adds flesh and blood, sweat and tears to the process.

Speaking of the “fruit” that is the central concern of the relationship that God wants for each one of us, Jesus says: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” Become one with him.

To reach the goal of this oneness with God in Jesus, we must learn to abide, we must learn to draw our life from God at every step. Jesus said: “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” Jesus said all these things about the closeness he anticipates in our relationship with him on the night before he died, before he laid down his life for us.

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

In Jesus we learn that love is activated first by denying self and recognizing the other. Loving our neighbor who is standing right in front of us, preferring his or her welfare to ours. The divine life that is released in us, by drawing close to Jesus in his solidarity with the human family, and following him wherever he goes, is a promise of God’s abiding with us through every cycle of our lives.

Thankfully, we are an Easter people. We get going when the first water and the first sunlight is applied. God raised Jesus from the dead and so his life not just springs in us, but is spring in us, every time we believe it. As the world turns green around you, be reminded that Jesus himself was gathered together like a bunch of useless sticks, burned and cast out, only to find himself never abandoned, brought

back by love itself, the first fruits of the eternally living of those who have died.

We must let God remove what is useless in us, keeping us from our relationship to him. We must not be afraid of Jesus' promise to prune us, to prepare us to bear more fruit, to cleanse us by his word, to focus us on how our lives are drawn from his, how we live through him.

This week my wife and I celebrated our 37th wedding anniversary. We spent the whole week with our four children in two different cities. And the one thing I can say it feels like, after all these years, is that Kathy and I are one organism. We draw life from each other, life for each other, and live through each other.

As if someone were taking a pruning knife to my fantasies and expectations of how I thought the story was supposed to go, I smile at the memories of our first days, our courtship, our marriage – the spring of our closeness. Those are just the roots of a great vine that has, shall we say, taken on a life of its own. The fruit now is the mere fact that we have shared this life through every change and chance, that we have abided together, which renews my hopes, transforms my expectations, and trains my heart to look for more fruit.

I am so thankful for this crazy bush, this gnarly tree, that I now sit under with my partner of 37 years. Like every tree, every vine, that last, it knows how deep and how interconnected its root system is, extending miles and miles underground, and reaching up to the sky in unexpected places, half a world away.

I shared several wonderful meals with my children, the obvious fruit of our union. Some have found the love of their lives, others not. My prayer for them is they grow so close to the ones they love, that they become one living, fruit bearing organism, giving abundance and shade to all who come near. But also that they discover the divine life at the deepest root of all their dreams and desires, passions and affections.

Therefore, my deepest prayer for them is that they stumble across the divine mystery that a seed must fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit, that they would experience the miracle of dying to themselves and living to the Maker of All.

May these spirit drenched words nourish the soil of the roots they dare to cast into the earth, they long to see grow to the sky:

“God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

And so too, dear family of God, I pray for us.

Let the one who laid down his life for us remove what is useless in us, remove what is keeping us from drawing close to him, from following him. We must not be afraid of Jesus promise to prune us, to prepare us to bear more fruit, to cleanse us by his word, to focus us on how we spring to life through him.