

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5*

*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,  
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

**May 2nd, 2021  
Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**...We Gather to Worship God...**

**Call to Worship**

We are branches, rooted in the vine of Christ.

We come because we seek to abide in Christ.

The branches that remain in the vine bear much fruit.

And so we come because we long to be spiritually vibrant, alive, productive.

If we abide in Christ, then Christ's words will abide in us.

We come because we strive to be faithful disciples.

We gather for worship now to the glory of the One God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May all glory and honour be His today.

**Announcements:** We are glad you are with us today and welcome your online voices joining with us in praise and in prayer. Our Session would like to encourage our members and friends to prayerfully consider your contributions to our ongoing ministry here at Westminster. We have noticed that contributions at the beginning of this year are not as strong as they were throughout the past year. We wish to note that our fixed costs continue and some new bills for repairing the church roof have recently been received and we are unable to open our Bargain Box at present. We thank you for your continued support and prayers.

**Hymn:** 434 For the beauty of the earth

(Traditional version <https://youtu.be/IUBMAi4jA1E> )

(Cambridge Singers–John Rutter version <https://youtu.be/1bDoMfIYErE> )

**Prayer of Confession**

We come to God, not to justify ourselves but to repent and trust the saving grace of Christ Jesus. Let us pray.

Look upon us, loving Saviour, sift our thoughts and assess our feelings. Deal firmly with those things that have inhibited our love and diverted our energies.

Loving God, whatever you see as self-righteous, censure, as twisted, straighten, as heartless, soften, as fruitless, prune, as infected, cleanse.

Flood your relentless Spirit through our whole being, sweeping away guilt and its lethargy, and by the saving grace of Christ Jesus, heal the hidden springs of our personality.

Thank you, Holy Friend, for answering our prayers before we get round to asking them, and for doing much more than we ask or think. Through your Son and our Saviour in whose name we pray saying “Our Father, who art in heaven.....  
Amen

### **...We Listen to God’s Word...**

**Word of God:**

**Old Testament:** Psalm 80:8-18

**New Testament:** John 15:1-17, 1 John 4:7-21

**Hymn:** 655 Give me oil in my lamp <https://youtu.be/Bopa6jHReqk>

**Message: Abide in me**

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me (Abide in me).”

And so begins one of the most precious texts in the bible for the intimacy of relationship between Jesus and the Father, and between Jesus and us. “Abide in me, just as I abide in you”. This is truly a precious text to read at any time in our Christian journeys’ and especially now in the midst of another pandemic lockdown and in the midst of an increasingly fractious society and world.

If you’ve been following us weekly since Easter, we’ve been using the lectionary passages and studying their themes. The first theme was doubt, then repentance, last week Charlene spoke on kindness as a marker of our faith, and this week, the theme is “abiding”....“abiding in Christ as the vine and we the branches. But there is a little

more to it, it is the theme of being in the vine who is Jesus *and producing fruit*. Jesus uses very specific imagery of vines and fruit (grapes/olives/figs) to press his message home to his disciples that there is a unique and intimate relationship between Jesus and his followers. Jesus is the vine,.. note- the true vine,.. and we are his branches.

There are a couple of problems most of us have with understanding this passage today. The first is that most of us are not serious horticulturalists or serious gardeners. We are not as familiar with pruning and grafting practices as a vineyard owner would be or an apple orchard owner. Our fruits come to us on the shelf of our grocery stores, in Israel you walk by the vineyards and the orchards every day....you see them as you look out your windows from about everywhere. And more than this, biblically, Israel is portrayed as a vine in many passages throughout the OT.

The vine image was familiar to Jesus' first disciples. A golden vine adorned one of the gates of the Temple. The symbol was so ingrained in the common psyche of the people that a vine was portrayed on the Israeli coins minted during the revolt against Rome in the year 70 A.D.

In this passage today, the seventh significant "I am" saying of John's Gospel, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1), Jesus was identifying Himself with the Messianic "son of man" references of the OT. Jesus is the true fulfilment of Israel's mission, and those who are rooted in Him are His ambassadors to a fallen world. The same God who once tended the rebellious vineyard of Israel is now identified as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The vine-dresser now tends to the branches of the true vine. The fruitful He cuts back, so that they might bear more fruit (John 15:2). The text goes on...

We are rooted in the Word of God (John 15:3). We draw our spiritual life from the Lord Jesus Christ just as surely as the branch draws the sap from the vine. This is seen both negatively (John 15:4), and positively (John 15:5).

We are nourished by His Word, and cultivate our relationship with Him through prayer (John 15:7). When we are spiritually fruitful, God the Father is glorified, and we are seen to be the disciples of Jesus (John 15:8).

One of the focusses I've seen on this passage and heard preached on in the past and maybe believed myself in the past is that "abiding/remaining" in Jesus involves pain...that pruning is painful. The literary description for this problem of

interpretation is called Personification: the reading of human traits and characteristics into inanimate objects. Mad as a March hare; blind as a bat; dumb as a bag of hammers, etc. It's a good literary technique that is as old as human speech, but it doesn't translate into this passage. The word that is translated as prune is actually "cleanse"...the text then reads differently and moves better into the next verse: "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he cleanses, that it may bear more fruit. v3 You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you". So there's no indication that pruning in this sense is going to lead to painful life changes, *but even if it did*, the question should then be... painful compared to what? Painful compared to the pain of ongoing sin or sinfulness??...a life of shame and misery and a constant sense of never knowing self worth in the eyes of God? But the text isn't focussing on this unhelpful theology where we somehow have to do the work to shape up before God...instead the focus in this passage is on God, the Gardener, doing all the work on us, and making it so that we can bear more fruit... "cleansing" us so that we are more lovely to others. The message in this text is that it's not what we have, or what we do, but what we are that makes us fruitful. We are branches of the vine of Jesus producing fruit for the kingdom.

And the very next question is "What is the fruit?" Well, the fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. The text rests on the understanding that who you are to God matters more to God than what you do for God. The text is about abiding and becoming. Abiding in Jesus and becoming more like Jesus. Learning to walk the way of Jesus the way Jesus walked the way. In Galatians, Paul talks specifically about the fruits of the Spirit. They are love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, faithfulness, goodness and self control. They are descriptions of the growth of the character of Christ in us and they culminate in the reflection of the love of Christ, and our own love, that emanates from us. And here is what we can't lose from this text, it is in abiding in Christ that God does the work in us to increase the fruit of our character in Christ. Let us not lose the sight of the message that we are "v3 already made clean by the word". We are in Christ, and he is in us. The message is not about performance it is about being and becoming with the emphasis placed on "being" in Christ.

Look the more we spend time "being" with Christ, the more the Father will prune/cleanse us more and more and produce more fruit in us. To which some smart so and so might make the charge "you're so heavenly minded you're of no earthly good", but that can't fly, not if we are "abiding in Christ"...the promise to us is that the more we spend abiding in Christ, the more we begin to reflect Christ and this not only changes us, it impacts those we are near.

There's no such thing as a neutral personality. Inevitably, unconsciously, as we move among our circles of influence we are either like the sun coming through on a cloudy day, and because we have passed by, somehow people feel better about themselves, and God seems closer to them, and people have more hope in their day, or (and you all know people of this persuasion) we are like a damp, wet mist that soaks into people's spirits, bringing gloom and doom closer to them, and making life seem cheaper and more meaningless. The saying "Every life is a profession of faith"...is a true saying.

My prayer at this point is that you already know this message of abiding in Christ and your life reflects more and more the joy of the Lord in your heart. But if by chance you struggle with this idea of abiding in Christ. Maybe you say, "I'm not worthy", well it's not about you it's about the Gardener. Well there's too far to go...a hill too tall to climb. Well, that's God's hill to climb and His journey to climb and we serve a really big God. Remember it's not up to you in a sense...v16 Jesus says remember *you didn't chose me, I chose you* and appointed you to go and bear fruit...!!!!!!

And finally, and importantly, remember too, it's not for our detriment and misery that God prunes us to bear more fruit, v11 it is so that "my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full". Let us remember the very nature of God. God's first characteristic of movement is Love. For God so loved the world. Remembering this reminds us that God only wants to give us good things, blessing after blessing, joy after joy. Producing fruit, as a by-product of our abiding in the vine of Jesus, is going to lead us to joy upon joy when we see the working out of God's power of love internally, through the fruit that comes from our growth in fruitfulness, (in our increase of love, joy, peace, etc.) and externally in those who come to know Christ and also grow in love, joy, peace, etc. Abide in me, even as I abide in you is a wonderful call to all of us to lean deeper into the presence of Jesus and know that He has cleansed, is cleansing, and will continue to cleanse our hearts to increase our joy and His own. Intimacy with Christ after all is us inviting Jesus to look into our heart and Him inviting us to look into his heart! In intimacy, in connectedness, in abiding in Christ we become one in the Spirit, and our desires match the desires of our Lord and King.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be in you today and always.

**...We Respond in Service...**

## **Collection & Dedication**

**Let us present to God our tithes and offerings.**

**(At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to [office@westminsterchurch.ca](mailto:office@westminsterchurch.ca). You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)**

## **Prayers of the People:**

Vine of life, in Your branches we are nestled taking shelter and nourishment in the shade of Your strength. With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope we have found in placing our roots in You, for in life You nourish us and Your Holy Spirit encourages us to reach our full potential in the gifts we have been given that others may know of Your love.

Lord, make us more than sour grapes and unripe olives.

In the hardships of the world may we look beyond the bitter politics and divisions to find Your love at the core of our relationships. There may all people work with what we have in common that we might grow to be a people of respect and trust.

May our branches bow with the weight of the fruit you have bestowed. Help us to look beyond our own needs, to recognize those who are hungry for food, love and justice, for meaning. May we offer others the shelter needed under the weight of Your branches so they find a rest from the cold and darkness, the hatred and loneliness of this world. Instead may Your Spirit enable us to value the gifts and talents of all.

May our leaves soak up Your light. When we meet those who are worn down with illness, loneliness, grief and abandonment, may the light of Your presence shine in the encounters we have with others that all might know Your compassion.

Gardener of all life, as You trim and shape us for Your purpose may we place our prayers into Your hands and trust that new seeds may grow from tired and empty thoughts.

Amen

**Benediction**

**Fairest Lord Jesus**

**Fairest Lord Jesus,  
ruler of all nature,  
O thou of God and man the Son,  
Thee will I cherish,  
Thee will I honor,  
thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.**

**Fair are the meadows,  
fairer still the woodlands,  
robed in the blooming garb of spring:  
Jesus is fairer,  
Jesus is purer  
who makes the woeful heart to sing.**

**Fair is the sunshine,  
fairer still the moonlight,  
and all the twinkling starry host:  
Jesus shines brighter,  
Jesus shines purer  
than all the angels heaven can boast.**

**Beautiful Savior!  
Lord of all the nations!  
Son of God and Son of Man!  
Glory and honor,  
praise, adoration,  
now and forevermore be thine.**