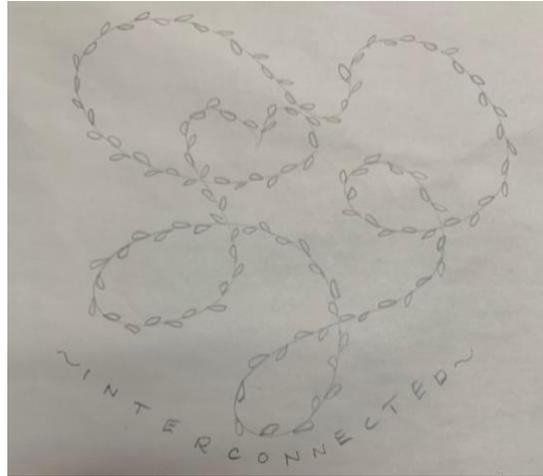


May 2, 2021
Fifth Sunday of Easter



Art by anonymous GCC artist on our ampersand art project

“However strong the branch becomes, however far away it reaches round the home, out of sight of the vine, all its beauty and all its fruitfulness ever depend upon that one point of contact where it grows out of the vine. So be it with us too.” - **Andrew Murray**

“Maybe you are searching among branches for what only appears in the roots.” - **Rumi**

Why not go out on a limb? Isn't that where the fruit is? - **Frank Scully**

The processes of growth are gradual, bearing fruit in a decade, not a day. - **John F. Kennedy**

“We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.” - **Brené Brown**

"Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand." - **Mother Teresa**

A life without love is like a tree without fruit. - **Stephen King**

"We are all leaves on different branches of the same tree."
- **Laura Lynne Jackson**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE: "Deep Shadows of the Past" by Annabeth McClelland Gay; *Patty Meyer, piano*

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us for the service this morning as we celebrate the fifth Sunday of Easter with the Word and a Holy meal.

During my time of respite, if you have an administrative concern, please contact Fred Breunig. If you have a pastoral concern, please contact Lucy-Spahr-Blazej. I will return to the pulpit on May 23rd for our Pentecost celebration.

Worship for May 9th will be a celebration of prayer, poetry and music of resurrection led by the lay leaders, and on May 16th, Brian Remer will be leading you all in worship.

You are invited to attend our annual Spring gathering of the Windham Union Association on this coming Sunday, May 2nd at 7 p.m.!! This will be a Zoom meeting. The link for the meeting will be on the church's website.

By popular demand, the Rev. Dr. Stephen G. Ray, Jr., the president of Chicago Theological Seminary, will be joining us to present a lecture "Race, Poverty, and the Mission of the Church." Dr. Ray joined us for our annual meeting last Fall, and his presence and presentation were greatly appreciated.

Although we really miss being together in person, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

So, as we begin today let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki
Tribe.

These people used this land since time immemorial

and are still among us in the present.
We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth,
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.

SILENT MEDITATION and THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP Inspired by John 15:1-8

One: Remain here.
 Remain here with me.

All: Remain in this soil.
Remain in this earth.

One: Remain among these branches.
 Remain watered in this love.

All: Remain where we can grow.
Remain here where God loves you.
Remain here with us.

OPENING HYMN: “Wake to the Spirit” by Patrick
Michaels; *GCC Virtual Choir*

OPENING PRAYER:

An excerpt from “St. Francis and the Sow” by Galway
Kinnell

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow

of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing

CALL TO CONFESSION

Family of faith, sometimes in our lives we need a little pruning back, a shearing away of things that don't serve us and keep us from being fruitful, from being our best selves.

Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches." Let us pray.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION by Bruce Prewer

ONE: We thank you, gracious God, for Jesus Christ the true vine, with His roots eternally grounded in You. We rejoice that by grace, we have been grafted onto Him, to be branches on a vine which bears the loveliest of all the fruits of earth. Yet we confess that all is not well with the way we live.

ALL: Forgive us for neglecting to draw deeply on the sap of Life, for our tendency to wander instead of growing on the framework You provide. For being content, and sometimes even proud of, a few sparse or undersized fruits. For the apathy which lets us to go through some seasons without bearing any fruit.

ONE: Merciful God, may we remain in Christ and He in us, through all the changing seasons of life. Let us delight in bearing the fruits of love which are our true purpose and joy. For Your name's sake.

Amen!

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus said: “If you reside in me, and my words reside in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.” Friends, we have asked for forgiveness and compassionate correction. It has been truly done for us. It is being done for us. And it will be done for us.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

CHILDREN’S STORY: “One Love” based on the song by Bob Marley; Adapted by Cedella Marley; illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton.

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

CHILDREN’S HYMN: “I am the Vine” by John Michael Talbot; *Sue Owings, Terry Sylvester, Patty Meyer, & Patrice Murray*

[Refrain]

I am the vine, and you are the branches,
live in me, and you will never die.

I am the vine, and my Father/Mother is the keeper,
Come to me, let the Spirit bring you life.

[Verse 1]

Like a tree planted by the living water to stretch its roots
into the living stream.

You will show no distress in the heat of the drought, but
still bear fruit and live.

[Verse 2]

Come to me, all you heavy laden. My yoke is easy, my
burden is light.

I will raise you up on the wings of an eagle, and to God's mountain will fly.

SCRIPTURE READING *Barbara Lee*

1 John 4:7-20

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 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. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 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.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot

love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE Hymn: #617

“Write These Words in Our Hearts ...”

SERMON Grown in God, Grown in Love

[i carry your heart with me (i carry it in]
BY E. E. CUMMINGS

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)
i fear

no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

I invite you to pray with me – **May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in
your sight loving and gracious God.**

Here we are in the fifth of the seven weeks that comprises Eastertide this year. We have been hearing stories of the resurrected Christ appearing to His disciples to reassure them, remind them of everything He had taught them and give them hope and courage. Now we launch into a series of stories in the lectionary, where we hear story after story of Jesus' teachings about intimacy with God to reassure us, to remind us of everything His life and death have taught us, to give us hope and courage.

Jesus, as He so often does, uses poetic language to try and help the disciples understand who He is and what He is trying to teach them. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus employs the use of parables, but here in John, it is all about metaphor. In this section of John, which is at the end of what is known as Jesus' farewell discourse, we have the last of seven "I Am" statements Jesus makes, starting with "I am the bread of life." (6:35) and "I am the light of

the world.” (8:12) and ending with today’s declaration “I am the true vine.” (15:1)

If the phrase “I Am” sounds familiar, it should and Jesus meant it to. You may recall Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai where Moses asks God: “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘the God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘Who is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I Am who I Am.” (Exodus 3:13-14a) Jesus using the “I Am” phrase is His way of indicating to the disciples the true nature of who He is.

When you think about that, doesn’t the statement “I am the vine, you are the branches” have an even more powerful meaning? We are all not just connected to Jesus, but to God through Jesus, and it is a connection that is completely interdependent.

Remember, He tells the disciples this as part of a farewell discourse, trying to offer some consolation. Jesus is assuring His dismayed disciples that He’s not abandoning them. On the contrary, He is trying to tell them that the connection they have will be even more intimate. What’s coming, Jesus promises, isn’t distance but rather a radical closeness, a companionship so intimate as to blur any sharp distinction between the companions. The enduring connection with His disciples, Jesus insists, will be so organic and integral that separation is virtually unthinkable. The disciples’ very lives will be signs of that connection, just as the life and fruit of a branch are signs of its ongoing connection to its vine.

Now, I want to put up what one of my seminary professors referred to as a “theological guardrail” here. Meaning that, sometimes, we can interpret Scripture in a way that sends

it off the rails if you will. In a way that goes against the notion that, as our first reading this morning told us, God is love. Jesus isn't saying: "If you want to live, you'd better stay connected to me, or else." Rather, "Don't worry, we'll be together; your life itself and all its fruit will testify to our ongoing intimacy."

Remember Teresa of Avila from last week? "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world."

This level of intimacy in a world that values and uplifts fierce independence can be uncomfortable for us, not only when thinking about a relationship with Christ, but most certainly in thinking about our connections with one another. That level of entwinement, of interconnectedness, implies that my life is not my own, that my choices affect people I don't even know. Suddenly I realize that that this level of connection requires me to hold two seemingly contradictory truths in tension.

One: that the point of my Christian life isn't me, my growth, my catharsis, my contributions, my achievements. I am inextricably connected to a larger whole, and apart from that whole, my spirituality, profound and precious though it might feel to me, is without value. In other words, I'm not the fruit in this metaphor. I'm not supposed to be the end product of my own spiritual life.

And two: that I matter more than I can possibly imagine, that *every* branch matters more than I can possibly

imagine, because the fruitfulness of God's vine is no trivial thing. It constitutes the life and nourishment of the world. I read a little bit about grapevines this week. Apparently, the best grapes are produced closest to the central vine, where the nutrients are the most concentrated. To cut myself off from the vine, then, is to diminish my fruitfulness.

We live in a I-can-do-it-myself kind of world. If the "vine and branches" are Jesus' metaphor for the spiritual life, then I think Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz Weber says it best: "Christianity is a lousy religion for the 'I'll do it myself' set."

My deepest prayer is that this past year has taught us a different lesson. If we can look over this past year, living through this pandemic, and see more clearly how very much we need each other, depend on each other, not just to survive but to thrive, then perhaps there can be a small blessing in the midst of all this madness. If we can recognize how the actions or inactions of one can mean the difference between life and death for another, then perhaps we will have begun to understand this metaphor that Jesus leaves us with.

We are meant to be tangled up together. We are meant to live lives of profound interdependence, growing into, around, and out of each other. Rooted, grounded and held together by love. "I AM the vine," he told his disciples. "You are the branches." It's a done deal, meaning that whether we like it or not, our lives are bound up in His and in each other's, meaning that the only true life we will live in this world is the life we consent to live in relationship, messy and entangled though it might be, meaning that the only fruit worth sharing with the world is the fruit we produce together.

In the Gospel of John's resurrection story, Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener, but maybe she wasn't completely wrong. What would it look like to embrace this mutual indwelling with God, this interdependence with one another? It would look like love: incarnate, tangible, down-to-earth, intertwining, intersecting, growing, fruitful, vibrant love. Let us fully embrace being part of God's Victory Garden, rooted and grounded in God's love, abiding in our connection to God and to one another. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: "Draw Me to Yourself" by Ted Loder

In this moment
draw me to Yourself, Lord,
and make me aware
not so much of what I've given as of all I have received
and so have yet to share.
Send me forth
in power and gladness
and with great courage
to live out in the world
what I pray and profess,
that, in sharing,
I may do justice,
make peace,
grow in love,
enjoy myself,
other people,
and Your world now,
and You forever.

HYMN: #487 "Abide with Me" by William H. Monk; lyrics
by Henry F. Lyte; *GCC Virtual Choir*

Abide with Me

1. A - bide with me; fast falls the e - ven - tide; the dark - ness
 2. Swift to its close ebbs out life's lit - tle day; earth's joys grow
 3. I need thy pres - ence ev - ery pass - ing hour; what but thy
 4. I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless; ills have no
 5. Hold thou thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes; shine through the

deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide! When oth - er help - ers fail, and
 dim, its glo - ries pass a - way; change and de - cay in all a -
 grace can foil the temp - t'er's power? Who like thy - self my guide and
 weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness. Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy
 gloom and point me to the skies; heaven's morn - ing breaks, and earth's vain

com - forts flee, help of the help - less, O a - bide with me.
 round I see; O thou who chang - est not, a - bide with me.
 stay can be? Through cloud and sun - shine, O a - bide with me.
 vic - to - ry? I tri - umph still if thou a - bide with me.
 shad - ows flee; in life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

Introduction to Prayers of the People: *Nancy and Tom Ragle*

This is the time in our service where I invite your prayers – prayers of concern or sorrow, prayers of celebration and

joy. If you have something or someone you would like our gathering to pray for you can type it into the comments section that accompanies this live feed.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE by Rev. MaryAnn Rennie

Vine of life, in Your branches we are nestled taking shelter and sustenance 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. 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 they 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.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us using whatever words help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the (kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespasses against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom (kin-dom), the power, and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #278 "Hear our Prayer, Oh Lord" *GCC Virtual Choir*

OFFERTORY

It's hard to know if we are growing, but no one has seen God either. We see God in the love we share. We grow with God in the mercy we give. Let us give our gifts of love and mercy.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your

weekly offerings to the church via US mail **38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301** or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church's website and clicking the PayPal donation button on the home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of our time and talents and dedicate them to continuing to grow God's love in the world.

DOXOLOGY: *Katharine Breunig, piano*

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

O God, let these gifts grow to reach the whole world with love. Remain in these gifts, O God, so that future generations might know that we love them as much as we love You. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

When they needed to hear it,
Christ told His friends: I am the vine.
No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,
you are part of this vine.
Come to taste and see. Come to find yourself among the
branches.
Come to this table to grow again.

Communion Prayer

We thank you, O God.
You remain here with us.
You have always been here with us.
We rejoice that You have stayed.

You have encouraged us to grow.
You've put us in the right soil.
You've shone Your light more brightly upon us.
You've fertilized us with Your love.
Whether Your people noticed or not,
You cultivated Your people.
You remained hopeful.
You remained expectant.

You encouraged us as much as
You coaxed the vines of this fruit from the earth.
You radiated the sun upon this wheat.
You shone upon the bakers.
You loved the harvesters.
You remained present in each moment
until this time when we could partake of these gifts,
knowing that You remain in these elements.
Transform us, O God, as You transform this bread and this
cup,
so that we might all grow into Your abiding love.

Prayer of Consecration

*(as is the tradition in silence or with music playing –
breaking, touching or lifting the bread, pouring, touching or
lifting the cup)*

Host of our salvation and Visitor to our lives, send Your
transforming power upon this Bread and Your freely given
love upon this Cup. Risen Christ, live in us that we may
live in You. Amen

Sharing of the Elements

Leader: The Bread on your table is blessed and
broken, a meal of grace.

Unison: Sharing love, we will never be hungry.

Leader: The Cup on your table is blessed and
shared,

like the overflowing of tears and joy.

Unison: Drinking deeply, we will never thirst.

COMMUNION HYMN: “Bread for the Journey” by Brett
Hesla; *Keith Murphy vocals and guitar; Becky Tracy, violin.*
Sung by the GCC Virtual Choir

Bread For the Journey

Bret Hesla

1, 5. Give us bread for the jour - ney. Give us bread. Give us
 2. Guide our way as we tra - vel. Guide our way. Guide our
 3. Make us one with each oth - er. Make us one. Make us
 4. Lead us home to the gar - den. Lead us home. Lead us

bread for the jour - ney. Give us bread. When our
 way as we tra - vel. Guide our way. With so
 one with each oth - er. Make us one. All the
 home to the gar - den. Lead us home. Where we'll

legs are get - ting hea - vy and we're hanging down our heads, give us
 ma - ny roads be - fore us, where to go is hard to say. Guide our
 walls we've built a - round us, may we learn to tear them down. Make us
 live with all cre - a - tion, find our place and nev - er roam. Lead us

bread for the jour - ney. Give us bread.
 way as we tra - vel. Guide our way.
 one with each oth - er. Make us one.
 home to the gar - den. Lead us home.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Loving God, we give you thanks for this feast, the nourishment we need to grow more wild and wonderful. Graft us onto the vine of your Beloved so that we might grow more connected with you and all of creation. With this food and this drink, let us be the love that we have found in You and your Beloved. Let us help to grow this love in the world. Amen.

THE CLOSING HYMN: “O God, In Your Love” music by Walter Chalmers Smith; lyrics by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette; *GCC Virtual Choir*

Oh God, In Your Love

To the tune of "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Walter Chalmers Smith

Oh God, in your love, you have made us u - nique. In
Lord Je - sus, you came to bring God's love on earth. You
Oh Christ, with your wel-come your church feels un - ease. We
So may your church wel-come in lo - ving ac - cord all

gifts and tra - di - tions, in ser - vice we seek. In race and in
wel-come the out - casts and showed us our worth. You reached out to
stand at closed doors tigh - tly hol - ding the keys. Yet this is our
peo - ple who want to serve Je - sus our Lord. Oh Spi - rit u

cul - ture and fam - ily de - sign, di - verse are the
peo - ple whom o - thers de - spised, you said all are
bo - dy, the church that you love. Oh Lord, do you
nite us in Je - sus the son. In mis - sion and

bran - ches in Je - sus the vine.
pre - cious in God's lo - ving eyes.
weep for your church from a - bove?
min - is - try, God, make us one.

BENEDICTION by Nathan Nettleton and Elsa Peters

Our worship is over but our service has just begun.

Remain with us, O God.
Grow with us, O God.
Go with us, O God.
Love us always, O God.

And may God the vine grower tend you and make you fruitful;
May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life;
And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love now and always. Amen.

THREEFOLD AMEN: Hymn #291; *GCC Virtual Choir*

POSTLUDE: "Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song" by Peter Cutts; *Patty Meyer, piano*

For Further Prayer and Reflection:

[Remain in Me by Gary Doles](#)

Aaron Nigel Smith and One World Chorus sings [One Love by Bob Marley](#) in honor of Playing for Change Day 2013.

[**What a Japanese Pruning Technique Can Teach Us about Our Own Souls**](#)