

# Abiding in Love

Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches, called to live together in the Christian family as an Easter people. God tends the vine so that we may produce the fruits of justice and love. When we abide in God, we bear fruit of that love to others. All are welcome to become part of this community.

## Focus Scripture: John 15:1–8

John's gospel contains many passages that begin with the words "I am." These verses are metaphors to help us understand the person and work of Jesus the Christ. Several of them come in the section of John called the "farewell discourse" (John 14:1–16:3). In these speeches, Jesus teaches the disciples about his identity and ministry.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine." The vine is a familiar image in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the biblical lands, vineyards were important to Israel's agricultural life. Extensive work was needed to prepare the ground for cultivating vines. Strong walls and a watchtower were built to protect vines from people and animals. Most of the grapes became wine. A productive vineyard was seen as a sign of God's favour – a vinegrower could expect a bountiful harvest when obeying God's commands.

The prophets used this image, describing the people of Israel as the vine and God as the one who tends it (see Isaiah 5:1–7, for example). The fruit of this vine is justice, and ruin comes upon the vineyard where injustice flourishes.

Jesus calls himself "the true vine," identifying his followers, then and now, as the branches. The Christian community is one body with many members, one vine with many branches that nourish its growth. The branches are only strong when they are connected with the vine stem. Jesus calls those who follow to abide – remain – in him. Without Jesus the Christ, we "can do nothing."

The vine lives out in the open air, exposed to the elements. Vines must be pruned – the dead branches cut away – in order to produce the best fruit. In verse 2, the Greek word translated as "prune" also means "cleanse." Pruning does not hurt a healthy plant, but stimulates new growth. So God tends the

vine branches, pruning and cleansing that we may produce the fruit of justice and love. When we go through difficult times, we may experience this image of pruning as painful. And yet we know that there are aspects of our lives that need to be cut away or redirected. Our fruitfulness is the way we are able to carry out God's work in the world.

The author of 1 John writes to a Christian community that is divided over differences of belief. Some members have left. 1 John 4:7–21 tells how important it is to abide in God. God is love and, when we love one another, God lives in us. Love is the fruit that we, the vine, produce. We are called to love our brothers and sisters, as God has loved us.

In the Christian community, all are welcomed and included. The gospel is for all people. Acts 8:26–40 describes Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian official. As a eunuch, this man could not participate fully in the worshipping life of Israel. Yet he continues his religious quest and reads from the prophet Isaiah as he travels home from Jerusalem. Philip meets him where he is, in his questions, and proclaims to him the good news of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian is baptized then and there.

Psalm 22:25–31 sings of inclusive love. All peoples, all the ends of the earth, will praise God, who welcomes all.

• • • • •

The good news of God in Jesus Christ is transforming the world. Strengthened by our participation in the life of the vine, we are enabled to tell others about God's love, to welcome all into our midst. When have you experienced the benefits of abiding in community with God's people? How can your community be a welcoming place for those who are seeking?

May 10, 2009

Focus Scripture  
John 15:1–8

Additional Scriptures  
Acts 8:26–40  
Psalm 22:25–31  
1 John 4:7–21

God, you are the vinegrower. We are the branches. Help us abide in your true vine, Jesus the Christ, so that we may bear much fruit. Grant that we may faithfully proclaim the good news until all are welcomed into the new life you so generously give. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

