

Today's gospel reading is perhaps one of the most well-known passages of the Bible.

There is a poetic quality to the passage.

A moving quality about it.

There is an invitation to the spiritual life kind of quality about the passage.

And read together with the reading from 1 John – one picks up the themes of abiding... of love... of fruit

Today's gospel reading is placed in what we know as Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples.

Jesus is preparing them for that time when he will no longer be with them.

No longer with them to teach them... to guide them... to encourage them.

And so we open with Jesus' last "I am" statement in John's Gospel.

The first one we find right back in chapter 6: I am the bread of life

Followed then by – I am the light of the world

Then – I am the door of the sheep

I am the resurrection and the life

I am the good shepherd

I am the way, the truth, and the life

And today we have hear Jesus say – I am the true vine.

These I am statements are signposts for those who want to know more about this Jesus.

They are a way to ponder... to live into... as we look to journey with the one who is the Christ.

I am the true vine.

In first century Palestine – this kind of language was common.

Many if not most of Jesus' parables had an agricultural bent to them.

Vines were a common motif in the Ancient World – all four of the gospels use vines and vineyards as way to get a point across.

So when Jesus tells the disciples that he is the vine and they are the branches

And the one whom he calls his Father is the one who prunes the branches...

He is putting forward an intimate picture.

An intimate way of seeing the relationship between the disciples and Jesus... the disciples and God.

This was to be an encouragement to them.

An encouragement to stay connected to Jesus

That there was to be an intimate union between the believers and Jesus.

This is somewhat similar in language to how Paul describes baptized people as now being “in Christ”.

This is what Jesus is saying when he tells the disciples to “abide in me”... to “remain in me”.

There are several ways we can abide – we can remain – in Jesus

1 – We remain in the community that knows and loves Jesus and celebrates him as its Lord

As we heard in 1 John: Love has been perfected – has been “made complete” **among us**

One cannot love in isolation... community is needed for there to be love. Another way we remain in Jesus is when we come together to break bread and partake of the Bread of Life.

2 – We also remain in Jesus on an individual basis through our personal spiritual practices

As we grow in our prayer life – our lives become lives of prayer they become lives abiding in the one to whom we address our prayers.

Both of these – the communal and the personal – lead us in the direction of a deeper knowing of God.

To a deeper, more intimate, knowing of the God who we find in our 1 John reading... is love.

This is an incredible statement to make.

The writer of 1 John is saying that not only does God love...

Not only is God loving...

But God **is** love.

This is the classical view of God found in most world religions.

Articulate in various ways... the claim is that that being which is most glorious... most beautiful... is God.

This connection is because love cannot be something apart from God because then God wouldn't be the most glorious... most beautiful being that there is.

The implication therefore is that love isn't a quality of God, but rather is God.

All that is loving therefore points to God.

All that is loving reveals in a way... God.

We are invited to abide in love. We are to remain in the one who is love.

This leads us to the theme of fruit that we find in today's readings.

What is this fruit that Jesus speaks of? Fruit that is seems we will be – in a way – measured by?

Some suggest is the fruit that comes as a result of bearing witness to Jesus – in other words... converts to the faith.

But this doesn't necessarily match the gist of John's argument in this passage.

Taken in context – I want to suggest that bearing fruit refers to the possession of the divine life itself and especially the chief characteristics of that life

Knowledge of God through abiding in Jesus... and love.

Throughout John's Gospel Jesus states that love is the evidence that one is a disciple.

Fruit here in these passages therefore are to be seen as the fulfillment of the love command we find two chapters earlier in John 13

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

There is unlimited ways in which love can be lived out...

Can be demonstrated... expressed to others.

One way is that we become a people living out radical hospitality.

A people who call out to – invite those on the outside...

we proclaim that the doors of the Kingdom of God are open – and they are open for all.

This is what stands out for me in today's reading from Acts.

A strange encounter

A God-led encounter between Philip and this unnamed Ethiopian eunuch.

Eunuchs were typically castrated members of royal courts...

they were castrated so that they weren't a threat to their king...

and were commonly in the service of the Queen or the King's harem

Greek word literally means "guardian of the bed"

They were, in a culture that valued family lines, now worthless.

In their castration, they are dehumanized.

Even within Israel they were not fully welcomed.

We find in the Law of Moses that they were excluded from the congregation

In other words, excluded from worshiping God in the Temple

But as the interaction between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch shows us
 those whom the powers of the day dehumanize
 those whom the culture says have no hope
 the Church opens its arms to them
 and through the waters of baptism they become one with us.

The hospitality of God knows no limit
 because the love of God knows no limit.

The love of God is limitless because God is love.
 It's who God is.

Such are the radical actions of those who abide in the one who is love.

Lastly, we must also be a people who are open to God's work in our lives.

What Jesus calls the "pruning" of God the Gardener.

This can be hard, perhaps even somewhat painful

As we learn to give up those parts or areas of our lives that don't reflect the
 character of God.

But on the other side of this work – there is blessings.

There is fruitfulness.

As we grow into people who bear the mark of love in our lives.

We become a City on a Hill – shining radiantly to those around us.

Of course this is a work in progress. And so we remember also what we hear in 1 John

*"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."*

In other words God is love, if we abide in love – abide in God we're in good hands and there
 is no need to fear the punishment or judgment of God – because these things do not come
 from love – that is, they do not come from God.

Jesus' whole mission, his whole life, we are told in John's gospel, is directed toward the
 glorification of God.

And this glorification is seen in no more profound... no more inviting way... than in love.

And we are also invited to make our mission, our lives, one that is directed toward the
 glorification of God.

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