



## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year B

Acts 9:26-31

Psalm 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

### Gathering

*(An unlit candle, a bible open to this week's gospel, pruning shears, a small branch or vine clipping and a bowl of grapes rest on a table covered with a green cloth.)*

This week we are reminded that fruitful living is dependent upon remaining with and trusting in a patient and caring pruner. Last week we reflected on the ultimate care of the Good Shepherd and our call to share in the care of the flock. How did you manifest this care this past week?

*(The candle is lit. The leader invites the members to rest in the presence of God. After a time, the prayer continues as follows.)*

Leader: Be silent  
Be still  
Alone.  
Empty  
Before your God  
Say nothing.  
Ask nothing.

Be silent.  
Be still.  
Let your God  
Look upon you.  
That is all.  
God knows,  
Understands,  
Loves you with  
An enormous love.  
God only wants to  
Look upon you  
With Love.  
Quiet.  
Still.  
Be.

Let your God –  
Love you.

Edwina Gateley. From “Psalms of a Lay Woman”  
(Sheed and Ward).

*(A selection of instrumental music is played.)*

## HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

*(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)*

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

## Reflection

The metaphors of Jesus being the vine of God, the vineyard grower, and the disciples being the branches of that vine provide a theme for meditation by any gardener re-engaging in the awakening growing season! The debris of winter covers the signs of new life emerging from stems and ground. The grower is called to patient discernment before taking any deliberate actions. What has failed to survive the winter? What should optimally be divided and moved now? Where does the garden need reshaping for better balance? Where can something new be placed? What needs more time to reveal its condition before a decision is made? What living branch must be cut off to make the whole plant more productive?

Every successful gardener knows that growing is not a brief task, but requires patient and constant tending during a long season. And so it is with each of us in our relationship with God – responding to God’s constant tending throughout our lifetime.

The intimate nature of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, and between Jesus and his followers is characterized by the vine and branches metaphor. Jesus is making it clear that each is dependent upon one another, and that survival requires not only remaining attached, but also producing good results from that attachment. Jesus uses the word “remain” eight times in this passage, a term which implies the promise of security and good things to come. Jesus’ request that the disciples *remain* connotes not only the significance of their relationship to him, but to one another, and to becoming a fruitful community together, to become church.

As a church community, we would do well to seasonally ask ourselves the same questions that the patient grower considers, and have the courage and wisdom to take the necessary actions. By bearing the fruits of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness and self-discipline... we will *remain*.

## Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What attachments of yours keep you being personally *productive*?
- ◆ How has God pruned you for the sake of a more fruitful relationship with you?
- ◆ What pruning do you need right now to be more fruitful in your living?

- ♦ What, if anything, keeps you from asking God for whatever you want?

## HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

*(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)*

### Response in Action Suggestions

- ♦ Choose to participate this growing season in a parish or community gardening project that results in donations of healthy produce to a local food bank or shelter. Weeders, waterers, harvesters and delivery drivers are usually needed for every garden.
- ♦ In this season of spring cleaning, *prune* yourself of possessions and donate them to an agency that will make them available to those in need, such or hold a tag sale to donate all proceeds to such an agency.
- ♦ Educate yourself on what invasive species of plants and insects are endangering the balance of the local environment ([www.ct.gov/deep/site](http://www.ct.gov/deep/site)) and take appropriate action at your home or area.
- ♦ Plan now to treat yourself to a visit of a public garden near you where you can meditate on the diverse beauty wrought by a devoted grower. In the alternative, if you or your family have a home garden, spend some attentive time tending it.

### Prayer

*(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may*

*be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment. Following this sharing, the leader prays as follows on behalf of all.)*

*Following the sharing, members join in singing, "Sing a New Song". The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, members pray in two alternating groups as follows.)*

I: God, teach me to let my soul rest, to still my worries and doubts,  
to stop my constant clatter of questions and protests.

II: Let me come to you sometimes and just sit quietly,  
like a mother smiling at her sleeping baby and listening to its soft breathing...

I: or like a small child intent on hearing a kitten's purr or a little bird's chirp...

II: or as if I were trying to hear a soft breeze moving across a pond,  
a leaf dropping onto the grass.

I: Let me learn to wait patiently and trustingly for you  
To make things clearer to me.

II: Teach me to be as calm as a lake after sundown...  
As trusting as a baby in its mother's lap.

I: Teach me to grow gradually, unprotestingly, like a flower...

II: To go unresistingly wherever you send me,  
Like airborne seed obeying the breeze.

All: Teach me to turn always toward you,  
The very essence of love and of life, the cause of love and life,  
The nourisher of love and life,  
The purpose of love and life –

The way leaves keep turning toward the life-giving sun.

Joan Bel Geddes

*(The bowl of grapes is passed. Members take a few to savor the sweetness. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)*

