


THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



April 28, 2024

FRUIT

being a hospitable host for growth

by Drew Downs

When Jesus talks about bearing fruit, he puts his disciples in an interesting spot. We are, at once, the host for the growth and yet not the source of the growth. It both gives and limits the responsibility we have in our work. So what do we do with that?

Often we struggle with being hosts for somebody else's good works. Even if it's God's. And yet, at the same time, we can get so caught up in the methodology of our

hosting that we aren't trusting in God's doing the work behind the scenes. Maybe we don't know how to calibrate our expectations.

When I consider times of great growth, most have come when beautiful things happen precisely because we made generous choices, were attentive to a need, and made joy our priority. Joy produces far more spiritual fruit than our usual priorities: perfection, tradition, or what other people think.

EASTER

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

The Act of Worship

There is nothing more elemental to the Christian life than worship. It is how we respond to the marvels of creation, how we orient ourselves to God and one another. And it is how we stay connected to Jesus's Way of Love.

So then, what goes into worship? How do we approach it? For many, it is simple: we show up. For church or for prayer. We break out our book or walk into the building. We center ourselves and just *do* it.

For others, however, that sense of showing up is less intuitive. Or perhaps a source of confusion or discomfort. *What if I do it wrong?* we say. *How do I know if I'm doing it right?*

Perhaps it comes from a sense of true newness. *What goes into our life together on Sunday? And how can I attune myself to that pattern?* Or maybe there is a lack of clarity of what we are supposed to do *outside* of Sunday morning. Surely our practices as Christians go beyond the worship service!

Where ever you are on your spiritual journey, I want to help us focus on what goes into our participating in worship. How we can prepare to read in church, carry the cross, or greet people to be with us. And how our life of common prayer extends beyond the Sunday morning and into our lived, real lives. Join us for two short workshops next month: **May 5th and 19th, at 11:30 am.**

With love,
Drew

EASTER

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2024

Collect

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 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."

EASTER

Reflection

In this short passage, Jesus uses the funny word, *abide* multiple times. It is one that has a lot of different meaning we attach to it—especially for those who live in the south. But these associations ultimately revolve around a common understanding of proximity. Of literally being close to someone else. Caring. Listening. Reminding. This sense of proximity, of being close to, even in the direct presence of, may be the most valuable part of Jesus's talk here.

This passage is part of the Last Supper, when Jesus is giving his final teaching to his disciples. And he has just spoken about knowing the way to the father and to the coming guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now he tells of relationship through intimacy. Living within his love. Being people so guided by his present love.

Christians have long struggled to define the nature of God's work in light of human action. Suggesting that, for God to have authority, miracles originate within God and therefore outside of humanity. Or else it would be necessarily of human origin.

But Jesus's focus on proximity, of our abiding in Jesus, listening, hoping, loving, reveals instead an inseparability of human and God action. At least, not when we abide in the grace and love of God. It provides a kind of spiritual union that allows the grace to show through us.

Have you ever felt so in tune in a moment that grace was so obvious? We often call it "being on the right track" or even "the planets are aligned." Everything clicks, there are only green lights, and the world is just perfect? I think it is something like that.

That most of us don't feel that every moment, however, is not an indicator of some spiritual failure. But something more like a reminder of what could be, is, and will be; when we bring ourselves closer to Jesus.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
