

Easter 5B

Text: John 15:1-8

Title: Staying Connected

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It's not good to be alone.

Disconnection. Isolation. Loneliness. These are things we fear the most.

Living out your life all alone in a nursing home. Being left by your spouse. Having no friends and eating lunch all by yourself in the cafeteria. For many of us, these are our worst nightmares.

You could be isolated on a desert island, and wind up with a volleyball for a best friend. You could be in the middle of the city, surrounded by millions of people who don't have time for you.

It's a frightful thing to be all alone. To have no one to turn to. No one to listen to you. No one who cares for you. No one to love and serve. It's not good to be alone.

Everyone is looking for a connection. No one wants to be alone. Join Facebook and you'll find hundreds of people who want to be your friend. If you're looking for a date there's hundreds of websites people who are looking for love. People are desperate for friendship, for companionship, for love. We all need to be connected.

When God created Adam, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." God did not create you to be alone. So God created woman and then God put man and woman together into a family. From that bond of husband and wife came the gift of children. Marriage and family is God's solution to loneliness.

God brings people together. He connects them. God knows that it's not good for you to be alone, and so God puts you into a family to care for you. God puts husbands and wives together. God puts children into homes with mothers and fathers. You were not created in a laboratory; you were born into a family to care for you and to love you.

Love comes from God. God is love. God's love flows through families and friends, connecting us to those we love. God is a connector.

Satan is a divider. Satan's job is to isolate people, drive them apart. Satan drove a wedge between Eve and God, between Adam and Eve, and the connections of paradise were broken.

Disconnected from God, Adam and Eve faced pain, toil and death. God is love, life, and goodness, and so disconnection from Him leads to hatred, death, and evil.

All of the disconnection that you see around you is a result of sin and Satan. Divorce. Feuding. Families who don't speak to one another. Violence. Hatred. Racism.

When we are connected to God, love flows from Him to us and out to those around us.

Disconnection comes when the flow of love is shut off. When we think of ourselves first. When we refuse to forgive. Jesus came to repair the broken connections and to put the pieces of this broken world back together again.

Jesus started with His disciples. Jesus connected the disciples to himself with the words, “follow me.” They were no longer just individuals: Peter, James, John, Andrew, Phillip, and the rest. They were disciples. They were part of a group. They were connected to something beyond themselves.

But after three years the connection was threatened. Jesus was about to die. Death is the ultimate disconnection. Jesus was going to leave His disciples. They were afraid that once more they would be alone and disconnected. This is where we are in today’s Gospel. It’s the upper room. It’s Thursday night. Less than 24 hours to go to the great disconnection.

Jesus comforts His disciples with these words. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” With these words, Jesus connects His disciples for good. This connection will hold, even through death.

How does this work? How did the disciples stay connected to Christ, even after he died, rose and ascended? How are we connected to Christ even today?

Jesus says that it is through His Word. The Word of Christ remains. We stay connected to Christ through His Word. Jesus continues to speak to us, to love us, to enliven us, to make us fruitful through His Word.

Jesus words come into us and love us, forgive us and change us. His words are the life-blood, the sap that the flows through us bearing His love.

Staying connected to Christ is not hard. Staying connected to Christ is not complicated. Staying connected to Christ is easier than trying to connect your computer or your stereo or your TV.

Jesus gives us His Word, and we stay connected by gladly hearing it. We hear God’s Word in our homes in our daily devotions with our families. We hear God’s Word in this place every week. It’s not just in the readings. It’s not just in the sermon. God’s word flows through our songs, through our prayers, through our liturgy.

If you want to stay connected, this is where it all happens. If you want to be plugged in to Christ and His life-giving gifts, this is where it happens. This is where the Word flows from God to you, back to God and out to the world. This is where you are loved.

It is a great sadness when people unplug themselves and disconnect themselves from the vine. On a typical Sunday, about two thirds of our congregation is absent. This morning about one

hundred of our brothers and sisters chose to disconnect themselves from God's Word, their source of life.

Jesus makes it clear what happens when you become disconnected. "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

Apart from the vine you cannot bear fruit. It is that simple. If you're disconnected from the vine you are dead or dying. If you stop eating you will waste away and die. If you stop hearing God's Word, you will waste away and die eternally. But that's not what God wants for you. He wants you to be a fruitful branch on His vine.

God the Father is the master gardener. He has carefully grafted you on to the vine, connected you to Christ and His gifts. He lovingly prunes away all the things in your life that keep you from bearing fruit.

Are you feeling disconnected this morning?

Do you miss family or friends who have died- your mother, your father, your spouse, your grandparents? In Christ we are all still connected. They are in Christ, we are in Christ, and so we are all still connected. Death does not disconnect you from Christ.

Do you feel disconnected, alone, like no one really knows you or loves you? You are connected to Christ. He infuses you with His love here every week. He loves through His word, spoken and sung into your ears. All of us who are connected to Christ are connected to one another. Out there there are people who don't have time for you, who don't care about you, who don't love you. In here the love of Christ flows through the vine to all the branches. We all care we all love because we are all connected. One family, one flock, one vine.

So Jesus is still at work, even five weeks into Easter, two weeks into May. He doesn't take time off for Mother's Day. He is the true vine. Today He connects us all to Himself, and to one another.

It's not good to be alone. In Christ, we are not alone. We are connected to the true vine.