

***P.S. 2020 Lessons We're Learning***  
***"We're Learning - Not all Labor is Productive"***  
September 6, 2020

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**John:**

The Gospel of John was probably the last of the four Gospels written. The "John" who is named as author in the title is not the same one who is introduced in John 1:6, that is, John the Baptist. Nor is a "John" ever identified within the text as the Gospel's author. Instead, the author is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved", an anonymous follower of Jesus who makes brief appearances at the Last Supper; the crucifixion; the empty tomb; and at the Sea of Galilee after Jesus' resurrection. Tradition identifies this disciple as John, son of Zebedee, but his actual identity remains unknown.

Like the other three Gospels, John is written "so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son". But at the heart of it is something more. Jesus' intent for his disciples is that "you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you". This, perhaps, is why John is the favorite Gospel of so many Christian believers. More than any other it draws its readers into the ancient story, assuring all who believe that they are "God's children, born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God". Its legacy is nothing less than a new birth, a promise of eternal life that begins not at death, nor even at the coming of God's kingdom, but here and now.

*-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 167-68 (NT)*

**Reflect on this Scripture:**

*John 15:1-9; 12, 16 NRSV "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed<sup>[b]</sup> by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become<sup>[c]</sup> my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

### **Commentary:**

The fruitfulness of each individual branch depends on its relationship to the vine, nothing else. What matters for John is that each individual is rooted in Jesus and hence gives up individual status to become one of many encircling branches. So abiding in Christ is both an individual and community experience.

The communal life envisioned in the vine metaphor raises a strong challenge to contemporary Western models of individual autonomy, privatism and success. At the heart of the Johannine model is social interrelationship and corporate accountability. The vine and branches metaphor exhorts the community to steadfastness in its relationship to Jesus, a steadfastness that is measured by the community's fruits. To bear fruit – that is, to act in love – is a decidedly corporate act.

It is "rooted" in Jesus' love for the community and issues in the community's embrace of that love as the central commandment of its own life. To live as the branches of the vine is to belong to an organic unity shaped by the love of Jesus. The individual branch is subsumed into the communal work of bearing fruit, of living in love and so revealing itself to be one of Jesus' disciples. To live according to this model, then, the church would be for the acts of love that they do in community (physically distanced or not). It would not be built around fast-track cultural model packed with individual accomplishments (an individualism easily disconnected from authentic community) but around the corporate accountability to the abiding presence of Jesus and corporate enactment of the love of God and Jesus. This would ultimately result in more productive lives and a more productive community – bearing the only fruit that will last – love.

– adapted from the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol IX, p 760*

**This week** – We're Learning that **not all labor is productive**. When we consider Jesus' last night with his disciples in the gospel of John, one of the most central images for the life of the disciple and the common life of the community of disciples is found in chapter 15 – the Vine and the Branches. The disciples would have been very familiar with the vineyard metaphor as it plays a significant role in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. Since in this analogy Jesus is the vine and his

disciples are branches, it is obvious that in order to remain fruitful, the branch must be connected to the vine. A disconnected branch will wither and a withering branch cannot bear fruit. So the disciples must abide in (remain, continue in) Jesus and his love (v. 9) if they are to bear fruit that will last (v. 12 – love one another as I have loved you).

The word abide (Greek “meno”) occurs eight times in this brief passage. In a fast-paced, fast-track world built around instant gratification, a person or community that slows down enough to truly abide in Jesus and welcome his pruning work may not be as productive in the short-term, but will ultimately bear the only fruit that remains – the fruit of life and community-transforming love.

### **Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. As you think about your lifestyle in general, do you tend to try to pack more in your schedule, or are you more likely to pace yourself and create breathing room?
2. In verse 5, Jesus declares “*I am the vine, you are the branches.*” On a scale of 1-10 (1 – very connected, 10 – very disconnected), how connected is your particular branch to the Vine (Jesus) these days? Practically speaking, what might strengthen the connectivity of your branch?
3. Jesus calls his disciple to “abide” (remain) in him and in his love (v. 9). What does it mean for an individual to abide in his love? What does it mean for a community to abide in his love?
4. Consider the “pruning” image of verse 2. What needs to be pruned from your life at this time in order for you to bear “fruit that will last” (v. 16).
5. When you think about Jesus’ words - *I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last*”- what kind of lasting fruit do you want your life to produce?

### **Activity for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: John 15:16  
*<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”*
3. Consider the lessons that you are learning in this season, and take some time to *abide in Christ*. As you pray, ask what might need to be pruned from your life or schedule in order for you to bear “fruit that will last.”