

The oldest known grape vine in the world is in Slovenia. It is over 450 years old and its grapes are still harvested to produce wine. Grape vines can grow to be quite old, they are often hearty, have strong roots and abide through many changes and chances. Small wonder then that Jesus compares himself to a vine. A vine which perseveres, slowly grows, and brings forth new chutes with each passing season.

Jesus invites us to abide in him. This is something that modern people aren't very good at. Most of us when we sit still for a few minutes tend to become inundated with anxious thought. After a year like the one that we have had, it's no wonder that anxiety was so rampant, so many of us had long stretches of time when we were left alone with our thoughts.

Abiding in Christ is like floating on your back in the water. It is trusting that Christ will hold us up. As my friend Brother Curtis Almquist is fond of saying, "hope is anxiety that has been through a conversion process" The conversion process that our egos must undergo is trust in God. Trusting that God will make

it right in the end. Trusting that God is our vinedresser.

Part of this trust is the acknowledgement that our souls will go through a pruning in this life. The beloved lyrics of Amazing Grace speak to this pruning process "Through many dangers, toils and snares

We have already come. T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far, And Grace will lead us home." The dangers, toils, and snares of this life leave their inevitable mark on us just as a vinedressers pruning shears leave a mark on a plant they're charged with tending, yet God gives the growth. God grows us into the people we are meant to be if we trust in the process of his pruning. If our heart trusts that God will bring us to our fulfillment.

There are ways in which we have all been pruned so that we might bear better fruit. What parts of you have been pruned as you have made your way on this lifelong pilgrimage? What are the parts of you that are still in need of pruning?

We may feel as though we have experienced a lot of pruning over the last year, some of us might feel like we've been cut back too far, at times like these we

can take a moment to remember that we are inseparably connected to the vine – we are all attached to that true vine that is our source of life, our source of joy, our source of abundance. Without being a part of this vine we are unable to bear good fruit, we are unable to find peace or fulfillment, direction or meaning. We have all grown out of this good vine. A strong vine with roots that stretch out deeper than we can possibly imagine, roots that are immune to the blights of this world, roots that drink from the pure springs of Divine Water. And we who would wither on our own grow forth from a good vine that gives us strength and nourishment. And those buds which we never thought would return during those long dark nights slowly begin to grow as the sunlight of the spring returns.

This morning, Jesus invites us to abide in him as he abides in us. It is a comfort to be reminded that Jesus is already abiding within us. This might sound a lot like when Jesus said “the Kingdom of God is within you.”

It’s like we’re all driving around in unfamiliar territory before GPS was invented and we’re feverishly looking for a destination and we pull over

and ask someone at a gas station, how do I get to such and such a place, and they laugh and say to us, you’re already in it. Truly I tell you, says Jesus, over and over again, the Kingdom of God is at hand.

St. Augustine wrote,

“Christ, while in heaven, is also with us; and we, while on earth, are also with him. He is with us in his godhead and his power and his love; and we, though we cannot be with him in godhead as he is with us, we can be with him in our love, our love for him.

He did not leave heaven when he came down to us from heaven; and he did not leave us when he ascended to heaven again. His own words show that he was in heaven while he was here: 'No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.'

He said this because of the unity between us and himself, for he is our head and we are his body. The words 'no one but he' are true, since we are Christ, in the sense that he is the Son of man because of us, and we are the children of God because of him.

For this reason Saint Paul says: 'Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is also with Christ.'

Sometimes all we need to redirect us to remind us of our purpose in life is to remember that at the very core of our being, Jesus who deeply loves us is abiding within us and if we stop to remind ourselves from time to time, if we stop to abide, if we stop to find our center, we can hear that still small voice which offers unto us that peace which passes all understanding. That small voice which says to us, I brought you forth, I am growing you, I am tending you and I love you. Amen.