



Apr. 29, 2018 John 15: 1-8 & Acts 9: 26-31

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Drawing with permission by Fr. Robert Beck

Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [Morning Prayer](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Orthodoxy.....](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

[The Vine and the Branches](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Beck, in this wonderful drawing, beckons us to enter into the mystery of the cross in a new way. It is a cross-laden with vines that have borne much fruit. The inescapable message is that each of us, by accepting our daily crosses, will also bear much fruit.

Again Fr. Beck: "In this sense, the pruning of the vine will be a matter of discerning what promises to claim the future in the present and what does not. Perceiving where new growth is emerging, and where it has stopped growing, discerning the dry wood and the green."

Jn. 15:1-8

1 I am the true **vine**, and my **Father** is the **gardener**. 2 He **cuts** off every **branch** in me that **bears** no **fruit**, while every **branch** that does **bear** fruit he **prunes** so that it will be even more **fruitful**. 3 You are already **clean** because of the **word** I have spoken to you. 4 **Remain** in me, and I will **remain** in you. No **branch** can **bear** fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the **vine**. Neither can you **bear** fruit unless you **remain**

in me. 5 I am the **vine**; you are the **branches**. If a man **remains** in me and I in him, he will **bear** much **fruit**; **apart** from me you can do nothing. 6 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. 7 If you **remain** in me and my **words remain** in you, **ask** whatever you wish, and it will be **given** you. 8 This is to my **Father's** **glory**, that you **bear** much **fruit**, showing yourselves to be my **disciples**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: God's glory is your fruitful life. How is your vine producing these days?

PRAYER: Lord, you used images of daily life to help us understand God's ways for us. There is something disturbing about this image of being pruned in your teaching today. I feel the sting as you "clip" off all those places in my life that take up energy that should be going toward producing fruit. It is hard to focus in on just what is essential. There are so many interesting or distracting things that seem to demand my attention. Help me to trust your pruning process so that I will bear abundant and life giving fruit. Amen

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

VINE: From Gn. 40:9, Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dream, to the angel gathering up the vines in Rev. 14:19, the symbol of the vine permeates the scriptures as a metaphor.

What makes this metaphor so useful when talking about God's relationship with you?

FATHER: The father of a family stood next in line with God in the power structure of Jesus' day. He had absolute authority to make decisions for himself and his family, conditioned only by the laws of God.

How does the word Father work in this part of John's gospel? Have you experienced God as one who is shaping your life? If so, what feelings do you associate with this process?

GARDNER: Often the vinedresser/ gardener are the symbol for God. The vinedresser/gardener was the one who planted and cared for the vineyard and vines.

How does the role of the gardener or vinedresser help to convey the message that Jesus is trying to make? What is it about that role that helps you understand God's process?

CUTS / PRUNES: To cut is to sever. To prune is to cut with the intention to make something more fruitful.

Have you ever been pruned? Did it feel more like cutting at the time? How long did it take before you saw its meaning? How has this process shaped your faith life?

BRANCH / BRANCHES: The branch was the image used when the people of God tried to talk about the coming One. He would be of the branch of David, and would connect them with all that God had been doing with God's people.

How does scripture study help you to feel connected with all that God has done in your life? As nature swells the branches of spring growth, does this study swell your 'branches' in order for fruit or flower to form?

BEARS: To bear something or someone is to carry them or nurture them in some way.

How is your trust in God's unconditional love nurturing or carrying you these days?

FRUIT / FRUITFUL: A healthy plant naturally bears fruit. It is the way we can use to judge the health of our faith life.

What fruit is your prayer and contemplation producing? Is it sweet or bitter? Do the blossoms promise a good harvest, or has harsh 'spring' caused damage?

CLEAN: A gardener knows which branches to clean off the main vine in order for good and abundant fruit to form. This apparent loss is necessary so that the vine can direct its energy to the most promising branches.

What needs 'cleaning' in your life for the energy to flow to your most promising branches? Can you remember a time when an apparent loss became the beginning of something fruitful for you?

WORD: Jesus' word is the way we stay connected to the vine.

What in this scripture passage helps you to stay connected?

REMAIN: Some translations have abide in place of remain. We do not use this word today with much frequency, so maybe remain works better now. But abide carries with it the association of living in, where remain does not have this nuance.

Which word works better for you as you meditate on this part of John's gospel? Why does the word you chose work better?

APART: To be apart is to be separated from something or someone that originally part of something else.

Are there ways that you were part of a process of spiritual growth, that now you are apart from because of the demands of your daily life?

Have you found yourself saying, "I need to get back to....?" What might that be? What happened to separate you from it in the first place?

THROWN: To throw something is to cast it away from you.

Are there any habits or activities that you could throw away in order to 'remain' in Jesus' words?

WITHERS: When something is removed from its source of energy it withers, and the energy is redirected somewhere else.

How do these words today enable you to withdraw energy from nonproductive branches in your life, in order to redirect that energy towards that which is blossoming in you?

ASK: By staying connected to God, Jesus promised that we could ask for whatever we need. He gives us the secret by telling us to ask as he would ask.

How does Jesus ask God for what he needs? Can you also trust God's process of tending your life?

GIVEN: To give something to someone you must first have it. Since we believe that God is the source of all that is, we can ask for whatever we need.

What do you need to ask for today? How does your ability to remain or abide in Jesus' words help you to decide what you need to ask for?

GLORY: Jesus sees his role as the one who makes visible and tangible the Father. We use the word glory to express the ultimate in beauty or achievement.

How is your fruit bringing 'glory' to God? Do you have the sense that the person you are becoming causes God to say, "Wow, look at how _____ is blossoming?"

DISCIPLES: A disciple is a person who is learning (being disciplined) from another.

What have you learned from your time with this text today that gives you a deeper understanding of God's love for you?

PARALLEL TEXTS:

Jn. 15:1 // Is. 5:1; **Jn. 15:3** // Jn. 13:10; **Jn. 15:5** // Ps. 127; **Jn. 15:6** // Ezek. 15:6f, 19:10f; **Jn. 15:7** // Jn. 14:13; 1 Jn. 5:14; **Jn. 15:8** // Mt. 5:16;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:

Acts 9:26-31; [Ps. 22:26-8, 30-2](#); 1 Jn. 3:18-24; Jn. 15: 1-8;
Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 8:26-40; [Ps. 22: 25-31](#); 1 Jn. 4:7-21; Jn. 15: 1-8;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Jn. 15.1–6: Vine, a common image for God’s people; see Isa 5.1–10. 3: Cleansed, or “pruned” (see translators’ note a). The image is of the necessary cu——ing back on a vine so that it will produce fruit. 5: Vine . . . branches, the branches are part of the vine; the comparison is not “stem” and “branches.” 6: The wood of the vine cannot be put to any other use if it does not produce fruit. See also Mt 3.10. 12. Pg. 187. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

You cannot grow in the integrative dance of action and contemplation without a strong tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to allow, forgive, and contain a certain degree of anxiety, and a willingness to not know—and not even need to know. This ever widens and deepens your perspective. This is how you allow and encounter Mystery and move into the contemplative zone. Richard Rohr

I have no concrete idea how Christianity will wrestle free of its current crisis, of its distractions and temptations, and above all its enmeshment with the things of this world. But I do know it won’t happen by even more furious denunciations of others, by focusing on politics rather than prayer, by concerning ourselves with the sex lives and heretical thoughts of others rather than with the constant struggle to liberate ourselves from what keeps us from God. It is precisely because a person as a whole is absolutely unique that one transcends all the categories by which abstractive consciousness would classify human life. The single large life in which I participate is a community of whole unique selves who freely form and constitute this large unifying life by the intercommunication of their creative love energies. So, far from being absorbed or dissolved, I feel that as a member of this community my interior sense of self-possession, or self-being, is more intense and clearer, in the sense of being more luminous and more truly "I." Pg. 30.
Bruteau, Beatrice. *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation*. South Bend, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Chapter 5 “Roots” deals with abiding in Jesus. The chapter ends with: “And if we simply live the moment at hand - without allowing ourselves to dread the future and without too much attention to the past except for a grateful glance now and then – we can hang loose and let the Lord move us as he will by the breath of his Spirit.”

Fitzpatrick, Mother Gail, OCSO. *Seasons of Grace: Wisdom from the Cloister*. Chicago. ACTA Pub. 2000. Page 35./

“Without me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5) Through the ceaseless use of petitionary prayer and through constantly experiencing its effect in our lives we come to realize our dependence on God, our need for him, experientially. We are forced to “live” this need for God. The Christian must be deeply convinced that religion is not something we *do*, not even something we do for God. Religion is what God does for us and in us and through us, so that even our efforts and desires and “cooperation with grace” is a gift of God.
de Mello, Anthony. *The Way to Love*. Doubleday, NY. 1992. Pages 74-5.

Only when we see ourselves in our true human context, as members of a race which is intended to be one organism and "one body," will we begin to understand the positive importance not only of the successes but of the failures and accidents in our lives. My successes are not my own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of my labors is not my own: for I am preparing the way for the achievements of another. Nor are my failures my own. They may spring from the failure of another, but they are also compensated for by another's achievement. Therefore the meaning of my life is not to be looked for merely in the sum total of my achievements. It is seen only in the complete integration of my achievements and failures with the achievements and failures of my own generation, and society, and time. It is seen, above all, in my own integration in Christ. Pg. 16. Merton, Thomas. *No Man is an Island*, Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 1955

I think gardening is nearer to godliness than theology. True gardeners are both iconographers and theologians insofar as these activities are the fruit of prayer ‘without ceasing.’ Likewise, true gardeners never cease to garden, not even in their sleep, because gardening is not just something they do. It is how they live. -Vigen Guroian

Long periods of well-being and comfort are in general dangerous to all. After such prolonged periods, weak souls become incapable of weathering any kind of trial. They are afraid of it. Yet it is a fact that difficult trials and sufferings can facilitate the growth of the soul. I know there is a widespread feeling that if we highly value suffering this is masochism. On the contrary, it is a significant bravery when we respect suffering and understand what burdens it places on our soul. - Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Just as after a shock of earthquake springs of sweet water sometimes emerge in desert places, and the arid wastes are irrigated and become fruitful, so in certain cases the shock of suffering opens up within the heart of a person hidden springs of living water, and in place of murmurings and complaining there issue from within streams of gratitude and joy (Ps. 119, 67,71). - Pt. 5, Sect. 1 –
(From a Christian Mystic, Singh)

We must look always for the hand of providence in our interruptions.
Rolheiser, Ronald. *Against an Infinite Horizon*, NY. Crossroad Pub. 2001. Pg. 229

I believe that God both wills and is able to bring good out of everything, even the worst. For this He needs people who are prepared to allow everything to be served for the best. I believe that in every crisis God wants to provide us with as much power of resistance as we need. But God never gives it in advance so that we will entrust ourselves. I believe that even our mistakes and wrongdoing are not fruitless and that it is no more difficult for God to cope with them than with our presumed good deeds. I believe that God is no "timeless fate" but, rather, that he waits upon and responds to our sincere prayer and responsible deeds. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer



True vine references: Is. 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; Hos. 10:1; Ezek. 15:1-6; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Ps. 80:8-15.

IMAGE OF THE VINE In this picture, a group of seven priests stand on the steps of the Temple under its golden vine. The golden vine, wreathed over posts at the entrance to the Temple (Sotah 7.6; Tamid 7.1,2) and you see their fingers touching one another as they pronounce the priestly blessings recorded in Nu. 6:24-6. The golden vine, wreathed over posts at the entrance of the Temple (Middot 3.8) is made of delicately twisted gold-colored wire, tinsel and a myriad of tiny beads. It was a gift from Herod. Individuals, however, could give a freewill-offering to purchase a leaf, a berry or a cluster made of gold to be hung on this vine. It was perhaps the actual sight of this colossal vine that occasioned Jesus to say: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman: (John 15:1). Biblical Archaeology Review. Vol. 19 No. 5. Sept. / Oct. 1993. Pages 66ff.

"How is the fullness of God's glory achieved in each one of us? If what I do and say is for the glory of God, my words and deeds are full of God's glory. If my plans and undertakings are for the glory of God, if my food and drink and all my actions are for the glory of God, then it is to me also that the words are addressed: 'The earth is full of his glory.'" - Origen, Homilies on the Visions of Isaiah

Vineyards of the ancient world looked much different from those of

today. Grown often on agricultural terraces built into the hillside, the vines grew along the ground and were supported on large rocks to keep the grapes off the ground and to prevent the plants from withering (seen on the uppermost level in photo).

Creative suffering burns clean, neurotic suffering only builds up more soot. (Marion Woodman)

The most pernicious heresies that block us from properly knowing God are not those of formal dogma, but those of a culture of individualism that invite us to believe that we are self-sufficient, that we can have community and family on our own terms, and that we can have God without dealing with each other. But God is community - and only in opening our lives in gracious hospitality will we ever understand that. Fr. Ron Rolheiser: Finding God in Community



SELECTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2009. Pgs. 101-104.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2012. Pgs. 71-74.

Mitchell, Stephen. [The Enlightened Heart](#). Harper & Row, NY. 1989. **CHRIST'S BODY:** Pages 38-9.

Grana, Janice. [Images](#). St. Mary's College Press, Winona, MN. 1976. **SELF REALIZATION:** Page 12. Cynthia J. Symond