

Dear Friends,

With news of our gradual reopening, I cannot begin to express my thanksgiving. As we continue to plot our course for the phased regathering of St. Andrew's, please know that we will do all we can to regather with orderly zeal, if there is such a thing. **But there will be no services at the church this Sunday.**

As I wrote in this week's Parish Announcements, the church remains closed until our Diocesan Bishop grants us permission to reopen. And as you probably know, she expects there will be some collaborative policies and plans in place along with the confirmation of deep cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing before we can open.

When the disciples experience Jesus as risen from the dead, they recognize his Spirit as gathering them into something new. They become a community of people bound together by the Spirit in love for one another and had not a parish church available to them in which to renew and refresh. God has entered your life and mine, takes residence and becomes the One who makes our love and grace possible.

This is the God in you: through the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ enters us, fills us, uses us, and leads us to a life that none of us could have otherwise chosen or found, and this is a promise whether St. Andrew's Church is open or not. Thanks be to God. And we will see each other soon!
In Christ, Beverly+

PRAYER

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons of the Day Psalm 66:7-18; Acts 17: 22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21.

PRUNING SHEARS

John describes God as the vine grower who has planted a vine, Jesus. The lesson suggests that God removes every branch that bears no fruit, and prunes the other branches so they will bear more fruit. The branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine and John tells us that neither can we bear fruit unless we abide in Jesus just as Jesus abides in us.

This part of the Gospel can be really thought provoking.

You may well have never thought about God as the vine grower, but certainly God is the Creator. And God did plant Jesus into our lives. Through the Gospels, we are invited into a more intimate relationship with Jesus so that we can spread the love and compassion we learn from the life of Jesus.

God is the vine grower and Jesus is the vine. Our roles are to be the branches. If we are the branches then we are also going to have to deal with the pruning part. That sounds like it is going to hurt. And every branch is cut even if it is bearing fruit now, because by cutting, it will bear more fruit.

After so many weeks of a “Stay-At-Home” order, we may have had a better chance to listen to ourselves to notice that some thoughts and practices in our lives could use a bit of pruning. You might be thinking of some things that are obviously in need of being cut away and maybe some things we wish someone would cut away.

Some have described new weeds in the vineyard. How about the weedy thought which makes us relentlessly search for the right cleaning products and with only one, go from store to store for more to try and provide safety for our families. And then, there’s the weedy tension of teleworking with everybody in the family loudly dealing with their own boredom or impatience interrupting your much-needed concentration.

Much more acute are those suffering from the grief of losing a loved one to the virus. And too, for those who live in a retirement community or particularly those who have family members in a nursing center, the challenges to maintain well-being are indeed great.

Of course, there is no simple remedy for the colossal amount of anxiety, frustration, and lament we corporately feel, but it can be individually addressed and dialed back with the right responses to our own mental health. That’s a kind of pruning, isn’t it?

But what about those things that are weighing us down and, as branches, we are at risk for breakage from the weight? It might actually feel good to have some of that removed. Because the virus conditions have improved, our civic authorities, for certain municipalities, are lifting some restrictions that have been weighing on us. And that is good news for all and especially for those in faith communities.

It seems as if there might be many things that fit easily into this category of needing to be pruned, and some not so obvious things, as well. The end result promises that we will be more fruitful. Our job here seems to be identifying what needs pruning in our lives and letting go, and what needs to be cut away.

Let us pray: *Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy. Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick, and life up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

Faithfully, Beverly+