



## Family Connections

### 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year B)



John 15: 1 – 8

Jesus said to his disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

“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. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in them bears much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

“Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”



Life  
Lessons

Reflection:

#### Two lessons:

1. When branches break away from trees, they die. They cannot survive without the life-giving sap that flows from the centre of the plant to its branches. Jesus uses this simple example to tell us that, without him, we cannot have fullness of life, that we will eventually die.
2. If you want better and more fruit, you need to cut away the branches that do not bear fruit. This allows for new branches to grow. God’s Word is meant to teach us what parts of our lives need to be cut back and what parts of our lives need to be given a chance to grow. God wants us to produce the best and the most fruit possible.



Table Discussion (at mealtime):

Jesus talks about how God uses his Word, the Bible, to help draw people closer to him, to help us address selfish habits and help us live better lives. “How is the Bible a part of your life? When do you take the time to listen to / read from the Bible?”



### **A Note to Parents:**

It is good to have a Children's Bible in the house for younger children and a regular Bible for teenagers. You may want to use the Children's Bible for bed-time reading when putting your children to bed. Teenager can be encouraged to read through the Gospels, one passage at a time, as part of their bedtime routine. The Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Psalms are also quite accessible for them. You will also benefit from a similar practice.



### **The role of the Christian Community:**

Jesus placed a great importance on community. Not only did he form a large group of disciples, a smaller group of apostles and continued to draw more people to himself, he also went to the synagogue on Sabbaths, the temple on holy days and taught and performed works of wonder in public. He was known for eating and drinking with a large variety of people and was always trying to bring the lost and the injured back into the fold. The Book of "The Acts of the Apostles" tells how that spirit of community grew and grew in the early days after Jesus ascended into heaven. We read passages from this book every Sunday and weekday during the Easter Season. You may want to set aside a few minutes each day to do so.

Community continues to play an important part in our Christian journey. Beginning with our own family and reaching into our many involvements in the larger community, most of us would not be able to survive without a sense of community. Take some time each day this week to reflect on each of the seven questions below. Encourage each member to take five minutes to reflect on each of the daily questions, asking God for guidance.

1. Our lives are lived in community, take a few minutes to list all the groups you belong to: (i.e. family, friends, faith, sports, clubs, virtual groups, etc.).
2. What do I gain by being part of a community? Take a moment to thank God.
3. What makes living in community hard? Take a moment to ask for God's help.
4. How does community life challenge me to grow in love?
5. How does community life challenge me to forgive?
6. Communities are often far from perfect. How can I help to make my family/parish better?
7. Jesus says: "I am the vine and you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing (that branch withers)." How are these statements true in your life and in your connection to the communities in which he has placed you?



### **The Feast (a bedtime Story):**

Once upon a time, there was a little town that wanted to celebrate their town's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Everyone thought it was a splendid idea, but no one was willing to offer their time and energy to help organize it. So, the town office sent out a notice: "In order to celebrate our town's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and, so as not to ask too much of our citizens, we ask that each household contribute one bowl of salad, one pot of pasta, one plate of deserts and a gallon of wine to the feast. We also ask that each person bring their own plate, glass, cup and cutlery so that no one will have to clean the large stack of dishes afterwards." In order to collect the great amount of wine that was expected, a big empty vat was placed in the centre of town.

The citizens thought it was a great idea. They could still have their party, without having to worry about all the extra work. After all, a bowl of salad, a pot of pasta and a plate of desert was nothing more than what they would usually prepare, and to clean the few dishes they brought was no more than what they usually did.

The great big vat for wine, in the centre town, presented its own problem. One family, on seeing how big it was, and how little difference their gallon of wine made in filling it, decided to pour in a gallon of water instead of wine. "With all those many gallons of wine," they reasoned, "no one will even notice that we poured in a gallon of water instead."

What a surprise they had, that when the time came to pour out the first glass of wine, each and every single household had reasoned in the same way and done the same thing. Water, instead of wine, five hundred gallons of it, glass after glass, it poured out the same. At first, they frowned, but then they started to laugh and embrace. "Great minds think alike," they chuckled, one to another, but in their hearts they knew, "What did we expect to receive, when we were not willing to contribute? What will ever become of our town, if we are not there for one another?"

And, from that day onwards, things began to change. Neighbours were offering their help, one to another. Feasts were more frequent, joyful and glamorous. People stepped forward to help at a moment's notice. Everyone was looking after one another, no longer holding back, but sharing what they had.



### **Grafting:**

I knew a man who had a tree in his front yard that bore two varieties of apples, Italian plums, pears and peaches, each on separate branches. How did he do it? He knew the art of grafting.

- He cut a big limb off four different trees.
- He carved the wide end of each limb into a "v".
- He cut four identical "v" shapes into the main trunk of his apple tree.
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- He joined the new limb into one of the "v" shaped cuts of the trunk.
- He bound the limb to the trunk with long strips of cloth.
- He gave the tree the nourishment and water it needed to heal.

**Note:** He waited a few months before adding another limb to the tree. Doing all four at the same time would have been too much.

**The Result:** - Each limb drew its life from the sap of the trunk, but each branch produced its own specific fruit. How cool is that?

Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Without me, you can do nothing."

Through **Baptism** we continue to graft new branches unto the vine that is Christ. How are we making sure that this grafting is successful and will become part of our children's natural lives?

- A strong connection with your local parish.
- A family-focused parish (this requires a partnership and ongoing initiatives by all stakeholders).
- An early introduction into faith at home (i.e. established prayer times (at meals and at night), the marking of religious feast days and seasons, religious story books, religious symbols, use of blessings, etc.).
- Parents who pray, have an ongoing relationship with Christ and his Church, and witness to it in their charitable works.

**The overall benefit** for you, your child and your family: the gift of faith to draw on for strength, Christian virtue, consolation, purpose, support and hope. **JOY!!!**

## **Runaway** (a reflection):

Have you ever tried to run away from God? That's what Jonah tried to do, so many years ago. And, you know what happened to Jonah. Poor old Jonah, he was swallowed up, in the belly of a whale.

But, seriously, have you ever tried to run away from God, or cut yourself off from the God who saved you? No, he won't punish you and he won't chew you out for it either. He loves you too much to do anything of the kind. But he won't leave you either. He knows that, cut off from him, you can do nothing. In fact, cut off, like a branch from a tree, you will slowly wither into a lifeless stick.

That's why he doesn't abandon you, but redoubles his efforts. Though the spirit inside us may begin to die, he will continue to find new ways to make himself known to us and to heal the separation that we caused.

Sometimes it takes a long time for us to tire out from running away. Sometimes it may take years before we fully realize what we are doing. Even though we may have cut ourselves away from him, God never cuts himself off from us.

### And... **The Little Runaway:**

Have you ever tried running away from home, packed your bag and stepped out the door? How far did you make it and where did you go? How long did it take before you went home?

I made it to the corner once. I could still see my house. Mom was watching from the window, she wasn't mad at all. When I look back and think of God, I'm sure that he is doing much the same.