

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter
St. Catherine of Siena (as a Commemoration)
April 29, 2018
Barb Marshall

Psalm 22:24-30
Acts 8:26-40

I John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8

May the Holy Spirit think through us; live through us; love through us.

The metaphor of Israel as a vineyard is one that occurs in Isaiah and Ezekiel. In today's Gospel of John, Jesus makes it clear that the Incarnation of God is the key to the capacity of any human to bear fruit. "I am the true vine" is the last of the seven great I AM sayings of the Gospel of John. So God is the vine grower, strongly suggestive of the act of creation. Jesus is the true vine. And the disciples are the branches. An effective branch needs to be firmly connected to the heart of the vine. So we have a powerful image of abiding; the disciples must abide in Christ if they are going to be affective. It illustrates that even a healthy vine needs some pruning to encourage healthy growth and abundant fruit.

The image of the vine spreads across the Old and New Testaments. The two reveal to us the nature of God and His expectations.

What does it mean for you and I to be disciples of Christ – his branches?

Being members of a Total Ministry Church is challenging, presenting us with many opportunities for formation, reflection, discernment, patience and ministry. Because we are Jesus' disciples, it is impossible to be a Christian alone.

Living and practicing a sacramental life binds us together. Like a vine, the church is in a constant process of change, nourishment, care, and growth.

As a Total Ministry Church, we are encouraged to use our spiritual gifts as we live out our Baptismal Covenant in the church and in our communities.

Our Book of Common Prayer has a section called Catechism. There are prayer books in the pews this morning. Please take one and turn to Page 855. We will take a closer look at what we, as Christ Disciples are expected to do.

At the top of the page is the question - What is the mission of the Church? Let's read the answer together.

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

(I will invite the congregation to answer each question after I read it.)

How does the Church pursue its mission?

The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all members.

Who are the ministers of the Church?

The ministers of the Church are lay person, bishops, priests, and deacons. (Take a closer look at who is listed first. That is each of us.)

What is the ministry of the laity?

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Let's skip over to page 856 – third question down.

What is the duty of all Christians?

The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

You may be wondering why I skipped over the ministry of the bishop, priest, and deacon. It's because we are a Total Ministry church and the commissioned team needs each and every one of you (who are also ministers just like Linda, Paul, and myself) to do the work Jesus commanded of all his disciples. That takes more than 3 people. St. Patrick's ministry support team may provide guidance and leadership along the way, but the work is the task of all of us. None of us can do it alone. Knowing our Power-Source gives us confidence in our ministry roles as disciples of the King.

Recently, I took a close look at our parish directory and was reassured that we are using our spiritual gifts in this community. By each of your names, I listed your participation in worship, mission outreach, pastoral care, book and bible study, vestry, hospitality, music, lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, Eucharistic Visitors, coffee hour hosts and hostesses, sexton, ushers, plus numerous other roles. We are a busy group of individuals using our spiritual gifts in the church and the community. You all are amazing and that makes my heart sing!

“The Christian life is not like connecting with people on social media. When Jesus says, “Follow me.” He’s not talking about scrolling through tweets or posts online. He wants us to take our place in His body, filling the unique role He’s assigned us, using our special gifts, blessing others and receiving blessings. We can’t grow in our faith by signing up and then not showing up.”

In the coming weeks and months, we will be asking you to join the Ministry Support Team along with are interns, to take a look at what we have done, what we are doing, and our dreams for the years ahead. We encourage you all to participate as much as possible. Our plans are to pick an occasional Sunday during worship service to discern what is next for us as individuals as well as our vibrant parish. The MST is currently working on plans to make this experience interesting, simple, fun and not too time consuming.

Our Liturgical Episcopal calendar, in addition to listing today as the 5th Sunday of Easter, sets this day aside as a commemoration for Catherine of Siena. Catherine was the youngest of 25 children. At the age of six, she had a remarkable vision that probably guided her life’s vocation. She became a Dominican postulant and a nurse regularly caring for patients with cancer and leprosy whom other nurses disliked to treat. Catherine also wrote tirelessly to princes, kings, and popes urging them to restore the unity of the church. At that time, there was a great divide between the rival popes in Rome and Avignon. Catherine even went to Rome to press further for the cause of unity.

My closing prayer speaks of her faithful work as a disciple of Christ and hopefully kindles the flame in our hearts too as we move forward in the coming days.

Let us pray.

Everlasting God, you so kindled the flame of holy love in the heart of blessed Catherine of Siena, as she meditated on the passion of your Son our Savior, that she devoted her life to the poor and the sick, and to the peace and unity of the Church. Grant that we also may share in the mystery of Christ's death, and rejoice in the revelation of his glory; who live and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Resources for this Sermon

- Holy Women, Holy Men, Celebrating the Saints p. 350-356
- Jesus Always by Sarah Young, p. 100
- Forward Day by Day for April 5th
- Book of Common Prayer – catechism section
- Morning with Jesus – April 5th - written by Diane Neal Matthews
- Lectionary Levity by Ian S. Markhan and Samantha R.E. Gottlich, p. 133
- Connections for the 5th Sunday of Easter
- Our Daily Bread for April 28, 2018