

Straight from the "Hart"

September 25, 2022



Welcome Good morning, **welcome** to the Hartland UMC worship script.

(Note: L1 - Lay Reader 1, L2 - Lay Reader 2, P – Pastor,
ML – Music Leader **C** – **Congregation**).

Apostle's Creed

Offering/Opening Prayer

P: Holy, and loving God, we acknowledge that tears and smiles are both an important part of life. May these gifts be instrumental in wiping away tears and bringing peace to people here and throughout the world. Our hope is that no one will miss out on your joy. We ask this in the name of the one who came to make our joy complete. **Amen.** Ad. from Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Version [W&S]

Call to Worship

L1: Come, let's worship together our God, who silently walks by our side, who surprises us in ways that are beyond words, who ignites our spirits to revel in his presence, who inspires our souls to dance in his love, who frees our minds to rest in his holiness, fully comforted, totally quiet, completely his. Let's worship Jesus, the Word made flesh. (Ad. from © 2009 Mark Parsons in [W&S])

Music

ML: Today's focus is on the importance of the divine connection for us to live a productive life of faith. This first song speaks to why that is, and therefore how much Jesus means to us. Let's sing.

Jesus is All The World to Me

1. Jesus is all the world to me,
my life, my joy, my all;
he is my strength from day to day,
without him I would fall.

When I am sad, to him I go, no other one can cheer me so;
when I am sad, he makes me glad, he's my friend.



2. Jesus is all the world to me, my friend in trials sore;
I go to him for blessings, and he gives them o'er and o'er.
He sends the sunshine and the rain, he sends the harvest's golden grain;
sunshine and rain, harvest of grain, he's my friend.

3. Jesus is all the world to me, and true to him I'll be;
O how could I this friend deny, when he's so true to me?
Following him I know I'm right, he watches o'er me day and night;
following him by day and night, he's my friend.

4. Jesus is all the world to me, I want no better friend;
I trust him now, I'll trust him when life's fleeting days shall end.
Beautiful life with such a friend, beautiful life that has no end;
eternal life, eternal joy, he's my friend.

Review

P: In words and deeds, God has faithfully and consistently demonstrated his love for his people. Ultimately, his love is shown through Jesus Christ. He has already come to us as the bread from heaven, the light of the world, the entrance gate to the kingdom, the shepherd who offers his life for the sake of his sheep, his people; and as the resurrection and life, and last week as the way, truth and life – he is the path to the Father where we find places of peace in his presence on the journey, and then peace with him in heaven. And today he comes to us as the vine. Or as I like to sometimes play on the word, he is Da vine, (divine) and we are “da branches”. In the Old Testament, God’s people were not only the chosen flock of the Great Shepherd, they were also often portrayed as the highly valued vineyard.



Responsive Bible Reading

L2: O Shepherd of Israel, you lead your children like a flock.

C: We will sing God’s love song for his vineyard:

L2: I took you like a tender vine dug from the soil of Egypt. I drove out the nations and transplanted you on my very fertile hillside. I labored to prepare the ground, tilling the soil, and digging out the rocks.

C: I groomed the ground and planted it with the choicest vines.

L2: I built a watchtower over it and cut out a winepress in the nearby rocky hill. (The shoots and buds I nursed so lovingly are my special people.) I waited for harvest. I looked for a bountiful crop.

C: We took root and filled the land.

L2: The mountains were blanketed with its shade. The mighty cedars were covered with its branches. The vine covered the land, extending its branches as far as the Sea, and its spreading shoots as far as the River. I had every reason to expect great beauty and bushels of grapes.

C: What else could I have possibly done to make my vineyard -- my people - flourish?

Inspired by and adapted for clarity from Psalm 80:1,8-11, Isaiah 5:1,2,4,7 intermixed and blended from NIV, TLB, VOICE

Interlude

P: Last week we were in the Upper Room during the last supper and Jesus gave comforting words to not be troubled in what would soon be troubling times. (John 14:1-14), Jesus continues to teach them in that room, saying yet again the need to love others as he loved. Then adds that he will give the Holy Spirit who will never leave them and will lead them into all truth. The Spirit is already *with* them and later will be *in* them. Jesus will not abandon them. He will come to them – and because he lives, we will live also. And when that resurrection happens, they will know that they and Jesus and the heavenly Father are all united as one.

A disciple asks Jesus: Why reveal yourself only to us and not the whole world? Jesus simply says that those who love him will do what he says, and to those obedient people the Father and he will come and make their home within each of them, and the Holy Spirit will teach them everything and remind them of everything Jesus said. As Jesus nears his conclusion, he tells them that he is giving them a peace of mind and heart that the world cannot give, so even in troubling times, don't be troubled or afraid.

(Summary of John 15:15-27)

Special Music

P: Before the worship concludes today we will hear Jesus say, in essence, that the key to experiencing the peace that only he can give and that the world can't take away is to remain closely connected to Jesus, to remain in his presence and allow him to abide in us. That's what this first song is about,



Constantly Abiding

There's a peace in my heart that the world never gave,
 A peace it cannot take away;
 Tho' the trials of life may surround like a cloud,
 I've a peace that has come there to stay!

Refrain:

Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine;
 Constantly abiding, rapture divine;
 He never leaves me lonely, whispers, O, so kind:
 "I will never leave thee," Jesus is mine.

2 All the world seemed to sing of a Savior and King,
 When peace sweetly came to my heart;
 Troubles all fled away and my night turned to day,
 Blessed Jesus, how glorious Thou art!
 (Refrain)

Introduction to Responsive Bible Reading

P: We left off saying God loved his people, his vineyard, so much that there was nothing more he could do for it to make it flourish, (and it did for a while) but now the next line from God's song about his vineyard is:

When I looked for good grapes, the vineyard produced only wild, bitter grapes. I supplied all their needs. I fed them until they were fully satisfied, and their thanks[?] --- was to want even more, and to turn away from me and make unholy oaths in worship of gods that are not gods at all. Run through every street, search high and low and see if you can find even one person who deals honestly and lives according to my ways... I looked for justice and found bloodshed in the streets. I expected righteousness, but only heard the cries of oppression. Even under the [somber sacred] oath of "As surely as the Lord lives", --- they know they are swearing lies. They refused correction. They were determined and defiant, setting their stony faces against me, refusing to repent. They unified in breaking their bond with me. They pulled away from my guidance and correction. They have been utterly unfaithful and rejected me, their God. They mock my power. They claim I will do nothing, that warnings of famine or war are just talk – that the prophets are full of hot air with no divine authority – that my word is not in them.

I will tell them what I've determined to do with my rebellious and sin-filled vineyard. I will take away its hedge of protection. [With its wall broken down] all

who pass by will pick its grapes. Boars and wild animals and insects will feast on it and ravage it. Wolves will pounce and destroy; Leopards will stalk any that go out and tear them apart. The vineyard will be trampled and destroyed. It will not be pruned or cultivated. It will be overgrown by nasty briars and thornbushes, and I will order the clouds not to water it anymore. Walk through the vineyard rows. Strip the branches from each vine, for they are not mine, but leave a scattered few to live.

Summary of From Isaiah 5:2,7,5,6;
Jeremiah 5:7,2,3,5,11-13,6,10; Psalm 80:12, (NIV,TLB,VOICE)
Intermixed, blended, then adapted for clarity and brevity

Responsive Bible Reading

L1: And so the Psalmist concludes with a prayer for the vine: Awaken your mighty power to rescue us. Bring us back to you, O God.

C: Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

L1: Look down on us in joy and love and rescue us from this sea of darkness. See our plight and care for your vine. Protect the root that you yourself have planted, this son you have raised up for yourself. Strengthen the man you love, the son of your choice.

C: Then we will never turn away from you again. Revive us to trust in you.

L1: Turn us again to yourself, O Lord God Almighty. We will call on your name.

C: Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:2b,3,14-19 NIV,TLB,VOICE
Intermixed, blended, then adapted for clarity and brevity....

Special Music

P: The Psalmist (who lives in the southern kingdom) pleads for God to intercede for the northern kingdom, (or its king); after it fell to the Assyrian Empire and refugees poured into Judah (the southern kingdom). While not the original intent of the Psalm writer, it is easy to see this as a historical illustration of the consequences what happens when sin disconnects us from God and our desperate desire for him to be pleased with us again and to save and restore us to trust in him. In our day and faith, this reconnecting was done through Jesus. This song expresses how sin tried to tear us apart from God, but his great love in Jesus brought us back and the bond of love we have for with him and for each other cannot be broken by any power.... We're going to sing

Now I Belong to Jesus...

1. Jesus, my Lord will love me forever, From Him no pow'r of evil can sever,
He gave His life to ransom my soul; Now I belong to Him;

Chorus

Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone, But for eternity.

2. Once I was lost in sin's degradation, Jesus came down to bring me salvation,
Lifted me up from sorrow and shame, Now I belong to Him;

Chorus

3. Joy floods my soul for Jesus has saved me,
Freed me from sin that long had enslaved me
His precious blood, He came to redeem, Now I belong to Him;

Chorus

Prayers

ML: That kind of relationship implies a prioritized focus. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face,
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace.

(Repeat)

Pastor's Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, your Word calls us to abide in you; to so dwell in you that it is no longer we who live, but your Spirit living in and through us. As we abide in you, your Spirit empowers us to love, admonishes us to repent when needed, enables us to forgive, challenges us to faithfulness and obedience, invites us to joyous worship, and beckons us to intimacy with both Creator and creation. We bless you and praise you for loving us with an everlasting, limitless love and for entrusting to us the responsibility and joy of participating in your vineyard.

Be with those who celebrate today for a variety of reasons. Be with those who are facing challenges that worry our days and haunt our nights. Be with those enjoying their dreams and those facing their nightmares, and everyone in-between.

Praises and Petitions Specifically, we are grateful to see Ann Martin with us today as she recovers from her surgery, Terri requests prayers for Brantley Call, a four year old with unexplained seizures, Joyce Schloss requests for her sister-in-law

Lynne, who is having 2 open heart surgeries in 24 hours. * We continue to pray for David Babcock's friend recovering from knee surgery * Debbie Kirkpatrick's brother in law John recovering from open heart surgery, Jerry Weaver who is under the weather, and any others that you lay on our hearts and minds in this next moment of silence. [Pause] Now remind us of all of your caring goodness that boosts us toward each next of our journey in life and toward you. We give you thanks for all the fullness of life we have experienced in you, and we give that thanks in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray... **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to Bible Reading

P: After Jesus tells them he is giving them heavenly peace, he says he is going away but will come back to them. And he has told them all about his death and resurrection ahead of time so that when it happens, they will believe it happened. And now, Jesus says, the ruler of the world approaches – he has no power over me, but I freely do what the Father requires so that the world will know that I love the Father. Then they leave the upper room. Their next stop on this Thursday night is the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there, or on the way to there – that Jesus – knowing his disciples are about to be temporarily uprooted and scattered, talks to them about being grounded. (Sum of John 14:27-31)

Bible Reading

L2: "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. My Father examines every branch in me and cuts away those who do not bear fruit. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit so that they will be even more fruitful. He has already tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and usefulness because of the word I have spoken to you. Take care to live in me. Remain in me, and I will abide in you. A branch cannot bear fruit if it is disconnected from the vine. Nor can you be fruitful apart from me. "Yes, I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in me and I in him will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you will accomplish nothing. If anyone separates from me, he is thrown away and withers; such branches are gathered into a pile and burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. Your abundant growth and your faithfulness as my followers will bring glory to the Father.

P: [Now Jesus goes on to amplify these verses by saying *how* we are fruitful, and this is obviously the key for John because we have heard Jesus telling this to his

disciples over and over in the last couple chapters of his book.] Some of this explanation of the vine sounds like this:

LR1: As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Live within my love. When you obey me you are living in my love, just as I obey my Father and live in his love. Follow my example in obeying the Father's commandments and



receiving His love. I have told you this so that you will know the delight I experience, so that you will be filled with my joy [and] to find ultimate satisfaction. My command is this: Love each other as much as I have loved you... I chose you, and I orchestrated all of this so that you might go and produce lovely fruit always. As you do this, anything you ask the Father in my name will be done. This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:1-8, 9-12, 16b-17 (blended

from NIV, TLB, VOICE)

Music

ML: In response to the reading and before the sermon, let's stand as comfortable and stretch and sing The Lord of Life, A Vine is He to the tune of Jesus Shall Reign)

The Lord of Life, A Vine is He (to tune of Jesus Shall Reign)

1. The Lord of Life, a vine is he and grafted to him we must be;
and thus we yield abundantly sweet fruit for all to taste and see.
2. If we be joined to him we know his strength and pow'r will help us grow.
His Spirit's grace through us will flow to prune and shape us as we go.
3. The vine is he, the branches we for now and to eternity.
His word sown deep in us will be both sun and rain . . . sufficiency.
4. The Lord of Life, the Source Divine calls us to come, with him entwine.
Will we, unhearing dare decline the call of Christ, the One True Vine?
Words Mary Kay Beall, © 2005 Hope Publishing Company.

Sermon I Am.... The Vine What Else Can Be Done?

The first three verses of that song sound so lovely, don't they? Abundance, strength, growth, sufficiency – well, there is a bit of pruning – but we often equate that with a haircut – no pain, no effort, just sit there. But that last line – called to

intertwine – that sounds like getting tangled up! And then it asks if we dare decline that call.... And we'd like to say of course we would not do that. But then we heard our Old Testament heritage that we have, didn't we? God did everything to make them fruitful – his own people – we're not talking about people who are "out there" who didn't know God – his own people, he did everything to make them fruitful and according to Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Asaph (who wrote the Psalm that we were referring to) we find a rather troubling trend – God has done all he can possibly do – in many versions it is asked as a rhetorical question: "Here is what I have done, What else could I have possibly done to make his people and nation grow?" And of course, the answer is "Nothing." And yet the people and leaders alike – his chosen people -- all were united in thinking there was no need to stay connected to God – and that there would be no consequences for disconnecting from the source of life.

In *First Things First*, Roger Merrill describes a busy man who decided to landscape his property. He hired a woman with a doctorate in horticulture. He emphasized to her the need to create a maintenance-free garden with automatic sprinklers and other labor-saving devices since he was too busy to spend much time – [and you are already laughing, aren't we? 😊] Didn't have much time for upkeep. He's a man after my own heart, but that is beside the point. 😊

She stopped him and said, "There's one thing you need to deal with before we go any further. If there's no gardener, there's no garden!"

Without the heavenly Father working the vineyard, there is no life. Without the Father working on us "extensions" (us branches) of Christ's life, we cannot remain in Christ's love, we cannot be attached to the vine. Jesus said, "I am the vine" a statement takes everything one step further than all his previous "I am" statements.

In the previous statements, Jesus is what he gives to us when we believe – he is the bread he gives to us, he is the light that illuminates us, he is the shepherd that guides us on our way and the resurrection that gives us life, the pathway to the Father. These are symbols of what we receive when we believe and follow him. But this last "I am" symbol moves beyond belief, beyond knowing, beyond even trusting in his faithfulness – it moves to an intensely heart-felt love and the deeply intertwined union between Jesus and his people. The connection plunges into the depths of our being and the relationship becomes intimately internalized. Think of that the next time you take the communion cup – next week on World Communion Sunday -- and drink from the true vine.

By saying he is the true vine, Jesus means he is not like others who falsely claim to be the source of abundant

True Vine: What do I pursue that hinders my connection with Christ?

spiritual life. By speaking of the heavenly Father throughout this, he is also distinguishing between earthly temporary things that claim to make us happy from heavenly eternal things that will fill us with joy. It is easy to get entangled with earthly concerns and desires and lose touch with our spiritual life. God's people in the Old Testament were chosen and carried through the wilderness and planted in the promised land, but Jeremiah and Isaiah and Asaph (in a different time period than those two – but that just shows you that there is a trend...) all warn that they were chasing after worldly things --- chasing after other gods. Think of our lives.

Do I pursue anything that hinders my connection with Christ? And in their pursuit, they became wild and bitter grapes, and as a result they will be destroyed by vicious animals (and what they mean by that is probably – locusts that can move in and destroy a crop... famine and drought, and also referring to enemy Empires that are referred to as “beasts” who come and threaten their existence. Jesus likewise tells the spiritual leaders of his day that because of their disconnect with God, the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to a spiritually productive nation. (Matthew 21:43) And in today's text, Jesus explains to his disciples (and to us) how to avoid that same wandering that severs our connection with God – because it seems like we do it all through history, and Jesus is trying to give us a way to *not* do that. And he gives us the example of the vineyard again.

In February-March, the gardener cuts off branches that don't bear fruit. This is

The gardener cuts off unfruitful limbs.

not the image of John the Baptist who encourages us to bear the fruit of repentance. In John's mind, you are alive or dead -- you can't be alive in Christ and not be a good person and not do good works. They have to go together. If you are in Christ, you are alive and growing in Christ-like attitudes and in actions – it is simply the natural outgrowth of your union with him. And if people are not growing in their connection with him, then in John's mind, there is no divine life in them. They *have* to be there.

So, this cutting off is the imagery we find in Matthew and in Jeremiah (See 5:10 Also see Isaiah 5:5-6, Psalm 80:12-13) where animals or the workers go through the field and strip away the branches because they do not belong to the Lord

because they aren't doing anything except consuming and diverting the energy the plant needs to grow fruit, but they are not growing fruit.

Since this conversation is taking place on Thursday night, the night Judas betrayed, the night Jesus was arrested, the night he was beaten and put on trial, probably somewhere between the upper room and Gethsemane, some speculate that this was a reference to people like Judas who had just left to betray them by doing the work of the devil. But it could be a little less than that too. It is easy to get disconnected without doing *the work of the devil*.

What do we do if we feel that is describing us – disconnected? First, understand that sometimes circumstances and setbacks and challenges may make us feel like there is no life when there really is. In a month or so, all the non-evergreens around us will look and feel like they are dead, right? But they aren't, they are just going through a season, and they'll be back fresh next spring. The Psalmists even tells us that mourning may come in these seasons of night, but joy will come in the morning. (Psalm 30:5)

Second, understand that if we truly are dead and disconnected from Life --- even if we feel we have patterns that seem to have done us in --to the point where we think we will never recover or be able to change and we are fit only for the burning. Even then, even Job (14:7 ff) of the Old Testament tells us it is not too late. That a stump that is dead, and its roots are dead, at just the smell of water, will find life again – and it will bloom. It is never too late to get connected. We know that from gardening too. We try to kill a weed – and they just keep coming back no matter what you do to – pull them up by the root and there is nothing left and they still come back! Can't get rid of them! That is what it is like with Christ. If you are connected with him, you may feel dead, you may *feel* disconnected – but turn back, and there he is, and you are bursting back into life.

And Jesus makes it clear that there is no greater joy in heaven, and should be no greater joy in us, than to realize that we, or someone we know, has come to believe and receive the life of Christ in their hearts and have become a new creation. Therefore, we should never write anyone off, and we should we never write ourselves off – ever.

So as the disciples and Jesus talk in this upper room, or on the way to the garden, he has already made it clear (John 12:23 ff) that it is only as Jesus dies and lives that he bears fruit and can offer life to others. (Unless a seed is planted in the earth it remains alone and cannot bear many seeds). We heard that last week. The

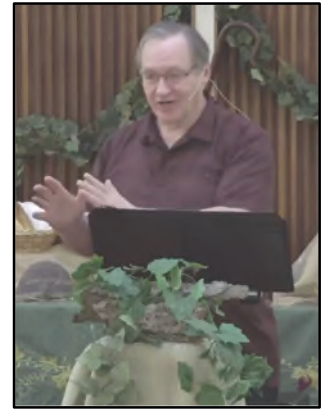
implication is the same for us. And in today's text, as he goes on to explain this vineyard image in the following verses, Jesus emphasizes that being fruitful means a growth in love which binds us more and more to Jesus as well as spreading his love and life to others. In John's mind, it makes no sense, there is no possibility of internally attached to Jesus the vine – and then to not be fruitful about it. To live a life of self-sacrificing love and to not bear fruit and produce more seeds. Now what that *means* may be different things for different people. It doesn't necessarily mean, "well then we should be a church of 500, right?" That's not what he is talking about, necessarily. It doesn't always have anything to do with more people, but with having more maturity in the people we have – there are lots of ways to look at what it means to bear fruit, it may be different for each of us, and for each church.

Prunes back offshoots: What offshoots hinder me from grounding in Christ and increasing my love for others?

But the way we become more and more effective at growing that loving attachment to Christ and as a byproduct, loving others more -- is by allowing the Gardener to work on us. August now arrives, and the plants have started to grow leaves, the gardener would come into the vineyard and pinch off the little shoots so that the nutritious life force of the plant would continue sending all the nutrition along the main fruit bearing vines. Can't have all the extra limbs just taking up energy. **What offshoots in our life, what distractions, keep us from grounding our lives in Christ and increasing our love for others?**

You've all seen the sitcoms where the people rent an RV and take a vacation. There is always one person in that RV who has it all mapped out every place we are supposed to go, and wants to get from point A to point B as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The vacation is not the destination, it is point B. Then there is someone else on that RV who thinks the vacation is not at point B but it is on the journey and every side road attraction along the way. Doesn't even matter if they ever reach point B or not. And then they put these two mind-sets together in the same vehicle and let the fun begin. Now on a vacation, both strategies have a legitimacy to them, it is a preference choice. But for today's purpose, let's say that destination B is arriving at an ever-closer relationship with Christ. That's where we need to get. But all along this holy way of Christ to maturity in him, up pops all these choices, all these alluring distractions and detours. Now, let's be careful. Because it is true that sometimes God might be giving you a detour and say that this is actually what is more important. We may have planned our day to do *this*

and God's got a plan over there, and what we may consider an interruption to our plan and what we thought was God's plan – but his plan was actually the “interruption” – and that might be the most important thing we accomplish that day. Let's set that aside. We do need to have that discernment for what is a distraction and what is a really needed detour... (“We're out of gas, we need to stop”. But what I am talking about is that there are alluring distractions and detours and some outright wrong turns, and maybe some are in and of themselves natural or even fine -- except that (in the RV – it gobbles up our gas, and takes away the energy, and gobbles up the time) and then we have no energy to go toward our destination of maturity in Christ – and before we realize it we actually are out of gas, on the side of the road, disconnected from our power supply. This is critical because Jesus declares that without his life in us, without his power in us, without him in us, we will accomplish nothing (that matters spiritually) and we will be stranded.



A missionary in Africa had a small generator to supply energy for his church and small home. And visitors noticed in his home an electric light hanging from the ceiling in his living room. They watched wide-eyed as he flipped the switch, and it came to light.

One of the visitors asked if he could have one of the bulbs. The missionary thought he wanted it as some sort of trinket to show others, so he gave him an extra bulb. On his next visit to the outlying mission, he stopped at that person's hut, and he saw, to his surprise, the bulb hanging from the ceiling on a string, and the man perplexed because it wouldn't work. The missionary had to explain that one had to have power, electricity had to be generated and run through a special cord to make the light work. Without God's life in us, we will accomplish nothing (that matters spiritually), but with Jesus there are no limits to how productive we may become. We who are one with the vine (will naturally ask for what the vine wants) and those requests will always be granted by the Father, because those requests will be associated with bearing fruit that he wants us to bear – and that is growing in love to God and for others; and in that growing love, God is always be glorified.

**Pruning leads to energy/power
for deep love and for mission**

In verses 9-17, which is a development of the divine vineyard imagery in those first 8 verses, we learn that the idea of bearing fruit is learning to love as Christ loved, and we skipped over that verse, but it said, willing to lay down our lives for our friends. Ignatius of Antioch, about 80 years after Jesus' resurrection captured this whole idea when on the road to be martyred for his faith in Christ, he said "Now I am *beginning* to be a disciple". In seeing what Jesus did for us on the cross, dying for us who were still sinners, we should feel the intensity and the nature of what is Christian love and to whom it is to be for.

And out of this deep commitment to love comes the gift of a deep-seated joy. Sometimes we approach the faith like "☹️ I gotta love somebody". And I understand that is a human feeling sometimes with some people and within us. But the idea is that with a commitment to love comes a feeling of deep-seated joy. It is a privilege to do these things. If joy flows from being united with Jesus, it is fulfilled by continuing his mission in the world, and in the service of his mission, we will be able to go and bear fruit that will last. (And that is like the Lions winning a game, you know it is just – good!)

Proper pruning which may be as painless as a haircut sometimes, but could also require a radical and sometimes painful change in habits or patterns of life – but either way, it **is worth it because it leads to increase energy / to additional power for deep love and for mission (which is simply a tangible way of loving others)...**

In the light-hearted movie called *Galaxy Quest*, which is a science fiction movie about a science fiction tv show that took place in the future, and the actors who played the actors on the TV show in the movie – the ship in their TV show was called Galaxy Quest, and so that was also the name of the show. Well, these actors are kidnapped by an alien civilization to save them from an enemy. The aliens had been watching the television series from afar but didn't understand the concept of fiction and lying and pretend, and so they took the episodes as historical documents, -- imagine Star Trek actors – well let's take that crew and do something real with them! and that is what these aliens tried to do. And they built all their technology based on those "historical documents" which was a fictional TV show.

When the actors are taken aboard a real ship, and called upon to fulfill a real mission, the faith put in them inspires them to become what they had previously only pretended to be -- they use the powerful technology provided them and they eventually saved the day.

God puts his faith in us and he gives us the power to do what he trusts us to do. And we, hopefully, by that will be inspired to become more than we could ever ask or imagine (Philippians 4:13, Ephesians 3:16-21) and we can do all things (we can be very fruitful) by being in Christ who gives us life and strength.

Prayer

Let's pray... Dear Lord, you said your word has made us clean. As your branches, sometimes we fall into the pits of life and get dusty and dirty and muddy. But you, the heavenly Gardener, comes for us. Rather than cutting us off, you find us and you lift us up, and you clean the mud off of us, and you tie us to Christ the vine – you pick us up that we may be productive, or productive again. Thank you for your grace that empowers us to serve you in your name, that everyone will know we are yours by how we love, bringing glory not to ourselves, but to your holy name. And it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

Music

P: If we are going to be vines that are more than we could ask or imagine, we are going to have stay close to him and envision who God is and what he wants for us and stay close to him...Let's sing

Be Thou My Vision

1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
2. Be thou my Wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou and thou only, first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.
3. Great God of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Blessing

So as we go, stay closely connected to Jesus so that as you now branch out into our community you may, through the Holy Spirit, continue to bear the fruit of love. By this, the world around us may come to know Jesus and bring glory to God. Amen.

* Note: All music lyrics: CCLI # 2561297

All Scripture readings are a blend of NLT, NMB, VOICE unless otherwise indicated.