

Fifth Sunday in Easter
April 29, 2018
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The vine, the branches, electricity and quantum entanglement—what's love got to do with it?

The “vine” was a common image used in the Hebrew Bible to speak of Israel as God’s people and conveyed the ideas of divine love and divine judgment. Using imagery, ideas and concepts common to the people were the simplest way to relate to them the message that we are all connected to God through Jesus—and God is love. Therefore, we are all connected to each other through love, and by our loving each other, we prune those relationships into bearing good fruit.

I like to think we have advanced in the last 2000 years, and I wanted to use an analogy we might better relate to today. For my illustration, I chose something we should easily wrap our 2018 minds around—electricity and quantum entanglement theory. The stuff we encounter every day!

Ultimately, my favorite line in today’s scriptures is, “God is Love.” It is simple, to the point, and for me it describes the indescribable. One thing I do understand is that God and love both seem to escape the kind of definitions we assign to language we use to talk about our lives and the world we live in. I thought of ways to describe how love is acted out, and how I respond to God in prayer, but it was more difficult to define the exact nature of love or of God. How do you describe God? What words do you use to define love?

Ancient Greek has four distinct words for love; *agape*: the love of God for man and of man for God; *éros*: love, mostly of sexual passion; *philia*: affectionate regard, friends and family; and *storgē*: love and affection especially between parents and children. Even with an increased number of words to help describe love, and love relationships, none of them really defines the nature of love in terms that our six senses can measure—that is, you cannot see love, hear it, touch it, taste or smell it with our physical abilities, yet we know that love exists because we can feel it in our hearts and minds.

In this world, I/we trust the things that we can see. But I also trust in the invisible forces in the world, and God and love are those forces. I cannot see them, but I can feel them, and I can see and know their impact on the world, and on our relationships with each other, and God and love are one, and the same.

How are God, Jesus, love, and us connected? Well, we have the vinegrower who is God, and God is love. Then there is Jesus, the vine, and he is the way to love, the truth about love, and life for us is abiding in love, abiding in Christ. If we follow the two great commandments, to love God and our neighbors, then we are all truly connected to the vine and the vine grower. Relationships mean everything, and when we abide – dwell, stay in Christ, who is our connection to love, we connect to each other. Loving each other is paramount to understanding and embracing our Christian identity.

A few years ago Dominion Power ran an ad with the slogan, “We are connected by more than just power lines.” I always liked that ad. The intension was to let the customers know that real people were out there in the rain and snow, risking their safety in order that we should have light in our lives. I always wanted to use this line as an ad for church, because that is what we are all about—we are connected by more than just power lines, we are connected to people and memories of them are more than just neural synapses firing, we are connected by the love of God. Think of a sporting event, concert, Christmas Eve, parties, any gathering of people where we can feel the energy and excitement building—define that feeling—yet it is real. Love and energy flows through all of us.

Energy connected to religious chants and prayers was studied in the 1980s—using an electroscope—it measures radio waves, electric impulses and such. Dr. Boguslaw Lapinski, a biochemist, claims to have successfully measured the energy produced when a group of people was at prayer – electrons are the purest form of energy, and their vibrations can be measured. In 1985, he took the technology to the shrine of Mesigrogoria in Yougoslavia, to measure the energy, if any, that was generated by large scale group prayer. For decades, thousands of people have gathered there claiming to see an apparition of the virgin Mary floating in the air. The energy spikes charted during the time of corporate prayer were huge, going from almost nothing to over 20,000 mR/hr. This corporate prayer and energy is a theory called quantum entanglement. Quantum Entanglement Theory supports the theory that human beings can communicate telepathically, and why so many cultures claim to communicate with other worldly beings. Do you think this might include our traditions and beliefs?

I am not sure if we have moved from sermon to science class, but I could not shake what I learned about quantum entanglement, and how it related to the vine and branches connecting us to God and each other. The times have changed, but the message has not, relationships matter, and we are connected to God and each other, regardless of what we believe—our souls recognize each other.

I want you to think for a moment about how you are connected to other people. Think about connections you made when you were a child, family, friends, teachers. Do you remember times when you had relationships that you thought would last forever think about the lost connections? Life goes on. If you are old enough, think about high school, college, military service, jobs, summer friendships—then time marched on and distance separated you from those relationships. Can you remember a time when you were sure you would always be connected to the people who were in your life at that moment? Think of the people that even though you no longer see them, you still feel closely connected. Our relationships change, but something connects us to others in ways that are difficult to explain, we often remain connected, sometimes for life, even if we never see them again. Try to put words to it, how are you connected to others? Can you articulate your feeling of love and connectedness in terms of the physical world? Was it a feeling or an emotion? Did you ever think of someone and then, they call? Can you describe that feeling? What was it that you trusted in that person that made the connection feel unbreakable? Some of us have not had many connections, and some of us have had connections that were not healthy, and we wanted to break them, but somehow we stayed connected. We are connected to each other in inexplicable ways.

Are you connected now to someone that you cannot imagine life without them? Are there people in your life that you cannot imagine being without today or in the foreseeable future? I can, you are in this room with me. But change is a part of life, and I will not always have the opportunity to interact with you and be part of your here and now forever.

It makes me sad and a little anxious to even think about it, but that is life. What I can take comfort in, is that, in this world, I trust the things that I can see. But, I also trust in the invisible, indescribable forces in the world—love is one of those forces. As long as I am connected to people by love, I will never completely lose them. I cannot see love, but I can feel it, and I know its impact on the world, and on our relationships. God is love, and I am connected to God, and I am connected to every person who also has love in their hearts—whether they agree with it, or understand it, or not. Call it quantum entanglement, call it the vine and branches, it all means the same thing, God is love, and we are children of God, and we are all connected.

One last thing I want to mention from the scripture today concerns pruning. I thought long and hard about what it means to be pruned. When I, the branch, sin against God and all of you, a little part of me dies. Nothing can grow on that dead part of the branch, no fruit can be produced from what is dead. The connection to the life giving force that flows through the vine to the branches is cut off. The branch needs to be pruned, in the same way I need to repent of my sins and be redeemed. Once redeemed, I can again bear fruit of the spirit.

Anne Lamott has famously said, *“Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don’t give up.”* *“So much of synagogue life, once the center of faith, has become hardened and legalistic—dead! So selfish interests, unconfessed sins, a careless disregard for the truth, or a bitter, unforgiving spirit can block the flow of life from the vine. Gradually the branch dies. It is taken away and burned.”* So much of our life becomes hardened, we disregard the truth, we have selfish interests and an unforgiving spirit. Call upon the vinegrower to come and prune you, cast away your sins, and re-connect with the vine that once again you may bear good fruit and stay connected to God and each other through love. **Amen**

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