

5 Easter

April 29, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 8:26-40 Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch

1 John 4:7-21 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is His Son.

John 15:1-8 Jesus is the vine; God is the vine-grower; we are the branches. Those who abide in Jesus bear much fruit.

When I was a teenage boy, I was active in Boy Scouts. I loved it. I loved camping out, I loved learning how to read maps and to follow marked trails. I loved wearing my scout uniform, and I loved earning merit badges. I looked forward to every summer, when I knew that my parents would let me leave the family business for a week, and go off to scout camp: Camp Portaferry in the Adirondack Mountains in NNY.

One year my younger brother Fred decided he wanted to go to summer camp too. So he signed up, packed up his scout uniform and camp gear, and mom and dad drove Fred and me to camp and dropped us off.

We signed in, were assigned different tent platforms that would be our homes, and each of us took off to meet our friends for the week. The next thing I heard, the counselor for my tent area came to tell me that my parents were on their way to pick up Fred. He was so homesick that he was making himself sick, and was almost in a panic. I tried to talk to Fred, but there was no solving what he felt inside, short of just being home. Have you ever had that feeling of being helplessly, out of control, homesick? Fred felt sick and filled with fear over being disconnected from what he knew.

I never felt disconnected when I was at scout camp. In fact, one of my best summers as a kid was when they let me stay at camp for two weeks.

But other things have happened in my life that gave me that feeling of being disconnected. Venezuela; I was dropped off at night at Hotel Bomba; one hour from Maracaibo; no Spanish; one twin bed that nearly filled the room; no hot water. O Lord, where am I? Has anyone here traveled to a third world area? Disconnected.

Another time of feeling deeply disconnected was when my father died; my mother had died 20 years earlier; but now I had no parents; no more chance to ask questions about their lives, or about me growing up, or apologize for the times I was a jerk. Disconnected.

Our Gospel reading is Jesus' farewell talk with his disciples during the Last Supper. He knew that when he was gone, they were going to go through some very tough times. They were going to feel disconnected from their beloved teacher;

from everything they imagined might be possible; everything they were supposed to do; everything they hoped to accomplish.

But Jesus taught about a new connection they would have that NOTHING could overcome. They were the branches; they were - we are - the vine. This was a call to the highest level of connectedness with Jesus, with each other, and with God. True believers choose to live our life IN Christ, abiding in him. I love that word: Abide (Sojourn, stay, live in, remain in). It sends the message that you and I are connected to each other through Jesus, and we receive our spiritual nourishment through our connection to Jesus. John said that the fruit we yield (the grapes) in our lives is; answered prayer, joy, and love.

When Philip and the Ethiopian met on the road to Gaza, the man asked Philip questions to help understand the Scriptures. Philip used that opportunity to teach about Jesus. The man's response was not, 'O, now I understand'. His response was, 'Let me be baptized'. That was not an intellectual response, it was a response based on love he found for God and for Jesus. He got connected.

I have told you before about the experience I put Ruth through when I came home from my Cursillo. That weekend explained to me what the previous 28 years of going to church didn't: that being a Christian isn't about accepting the Apostle's Creed, but about being in love with God. And when I felt love for God for the first time, I couldn't figure out how to express it, except to kneel and pray to God, thanking him for loving me. Ruth had seen a marginal Christian go away for a weekend, and somebody came back kneeling beside the bed at night, praying! "What happened to the Ken I knew"? Ken learned about loving God, and I felt drawn to express that new love I'd discovered. I was connected to the vine.

There are lots of experiences in life that feel disconnecting. But God offers you and me a source of connection to His power and purpose. Jesus has promised connection of our spirits with His Spirit. No connection could be stronger, or bring us more comfort, or be more important, because it lasts forever. Are you feeling disconnected in the pit of your stomach, like being far away from home, with people you don't know? Pray today's Gospel passage this week. Take your bible reading insert home with you and reflect on the connection Jesus is offering you. And remember that it all starts with your choice to love God.

Jesus offers his Spirit to be our counselor, advocate, comforter, guide, teacher, and intercessor; something he could not do in his earthly form. Through the HS we are given connection into a life-changing relationship with him and the Father; a relationship that gives us the power to take on the mind of Christ. Amen.