

“Not Good, If Detached”

John 15:1-8, Easter 5-B

April 29, 2018

The idea really started back in the 1970's, when some professional fundraisers began to devise new ways for high school bands, all across America, to raise additional monies to support their programs!

That's when these professional fundraisers -- came up with the idea of band members selling something called: **“RESTAURANT DISCOUNT COUPONS.”** Purchasers who bought these coupons could then take them into local-participating restaurants and receive discounts on their meals.

There was one important stipulation, however, connected with these books of coupons! Imprinted on each coupon were the words: **“Not Good If Detached.”** In other words, you couldn't tear the coupon out of the book at home and later present it to your waiter! You had to carry that little book of **“attached”** coupons into the restaurant with you and let the waiter tear out the coupon for his particular restaurant! Why? So that people could not recycle used coupons! Hence the phrase: **“Not Good If Detached.”**

When it comes to our Christian Discipleship, Jesus, in our Gospel Lesson this morning, is sharing with us a similar message!

Friends, let's remember that Jesus spoke these words to his disciples on that first Maundy Thursday. It's possible that **as Jesus and his disciples were making their way to the Garden of Gethsemane**, where he would begin his suffering and Passion in earnest, that they walked down **a road aligned with grape vineyards on both sides.** It was that time of year when the grapevines would have been pruned by a skilled horticulturist.

Obviously, there would have been some branches on that grapevine, that had been cut off their Vine completely, and were now laying alongside the road.

Can't you just imagine Jesus stooping down to pick up one of these detached grapevines--and to offer his disciples one great and final object lesson on his way to the cross. For these words are the 7th and the final one of Jesus' seven great "I AM" statements that are recorded for us in the Gospel of John!

Maybe, Jesus even picked up one of those branches and held it before his disciples' eyes when he said to them: **"I AM THE TRUE VINE AND MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER. EVERY BRANCH OF MINE THAT DOES NOT BEAR FRUIT, HE TAKES AWAY, AND EVERY BRANCH THAT DOES BEAR FRUIT HE PRUNES, THAT IT MAY BEAR EVEN MORE FRUIT"** (JOHN 15:1-2)!

There is little doubt that when Jesus speaks of himself here as the **"True Vine"** that he is speaking of himself in **CONTRADISTINCTION TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, whom God had adopted to be his very own people and with whom God had made numerous Covenants!** Although God had always been faithful to his people, they like the rest of fallen humanity, had certainly turned out to be anything but faithful to him!

In **Psalm 80:8, 12** we can hear the psalmist **both praising God and questioning God**, when he says: ***"You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it! It took deep root and filled the land. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way may pluck its fruit?"***

The **Prophet Isaiah** says similarly in **chapter 5:1, 4**: ***"My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill, but what more could he have done for it than what he did! He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded only wild grapes!"***

Because of the repeated transgressions and faithlessness of God's people, he pulled away his support, at times, from the people of Israel.

And it's this very fact is what makes those words of God the Father so very important when Jesus steps into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, when the voice from heaven thunders: ***"THIS IS MY SON WITH WHOM I AM WELL-PLEASED"*** (MATTHEW 3:17; MARK 1:11; LUKE 3:22)!

Jesus number one spiritual lesson to every one of us this morning, my friends, is that: **Real fruitfulness in the life of a believer is never the result, of our own human achievement, but of our constantly abiding in Christ, the True Vine.** And that's why these words of our Gospel lesson this morning should serve as a constant reminder to **EVERY ONE OF US TO EACH DO OUR PART TO REMAIN FAITHFUL, ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CORPORATE WORSHIP LIFE OF WHATEVER CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HAS MADE US A PART OF!**

Doesn't the writer of Hebrews encapsulate these very same thoughts for us so very beautifully, when he writes in **HEBREWS 10:23-25**, *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near!"*

Yes, we are saved solely by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ, which the Holy Spirit places there for us through his sanctifying ministry, but once we have been saved that are numerous times all throughout the New Testament when Christ and the apostles tell us to answer God's call to faithfulness!

How about Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:33**, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you!"*

Or again in **Luke 13:24-25**, *"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door; saying, 'Lord, open to us!' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from!'"*

Or how about St Paul's words in **Colossians 3:1-4**, *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory!"*

Not good, if detached! *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me! By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:4, 8)*

When you stop and think about it, aren't there a whole host of things in this world that are not good if they are detached?

A **lamp** is no good if it is detached from a source of electricity; if it isn't plugged into the wall, with a current flowing to that outlet that is live!

A **faucet** is no good if detached from a source of water!

When the **electricity fails**, or your connection to the **Internet** is suddenly broken--you may feel detached. When your car is in the shop you may feel detached!

In closing I would like to share with you a true and interesting story I came across last **February**, during what has become more widely celebrated in recent months as "**Black History Month**" all throughout the United States.

Ruby Bridges was a six-year old African American girl living in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1960; during that year when the federal government desegregated public schools in New Orleans. She was one of three girls that the federal courts ordered admitted to an "**all-white**" schools.

Ruby had to be escorted to and from school by federal marshals. Hateful mobs gathered every day to intimidate her--to vent their hatred--to shout racial epithets at this little girl. Ruby walked the gauntlet every day, and never seemed to be bothered by the invectives hurled her way.

When it became clear that she intended to stay, the parents of the white students pulled their children out of the school, so Ruby ended up as the only student in that school that year. It was just Ruby, the federal marshals, a teacher and the ugly mobs.

Dr. Robert Coles was a Harvard psychiatrist who decided to go down to New Orleans to visit with and talk to Ruby and write a scholarly paper about her experience. When Coles arrived in New Orleans, he asked Ruby how she was doing. She said that she was doing fine. He asked all the questions that he had been taught to ask a person in duress in his psychology courses, **but Ruby always said that she was fine. Her mother said that she was fine.**

But Dr. Robert Coles believed that this would have had to been an utter impossibility! Therefore, Dr. Coles kept trying to figure out how to probe more deeply--how to figure out what was really happening with Ruby and her mother. She obviously couldn't be fine, but how could he get her to reveal her inner turmoil?

Then one day he met **Ruby's teacher.** The teacher said, "**You know, I don't understand this child, either! She seems so happy. She comes here so**

cheerfully." But Dr. Coles said that he wasn't going to be fooled by Ruby's teachers' remark any more than he was going to be fooled by Ruby's mother!

Then one day Coles learned from a teacher that Ruby seemed to be talking to herself as she walked with the marshals through the ugly crowd. Coles went to Ruby's house that evening and said, "Ruby, I was talking to your teacher today and she told me that she saw you talking to people in the street."

"Oh, yes," Ruby said, "I wasn't talking to them. I was just saying a prayer for them."

Coles asked, "Ruby, you pray for the people there?" "Oh, yes," Ruby responded.

"Really?" "Yes."

Coles asked, "Why do you do that Ruby?" "Because they need praying for."

"Do they?" **"Oh, yes,"** Ruby replied, **"because Jesus taught us to pray for everybody--even those people who are the least loving towards us, who hate us!"** the girl replied.

Ruby's mother came into the room in time to hear part of that conversation, and she explained, **"We tell Ruby that it's important that she pray for these people."**

So each day before facing the angry mobs, Ruby said a prayer asking forgiveness for her tormentors. Dr. Coles's comments: "There were echoes here of what someone also said in difficult circumstances two thousand years ago.

There was little Ruby who had taken no courses in moral analysis or systematic ethics. Yet somehow she walked through that mob praying for those people, every day, empowered by the sayings of Jesus that he shared with his disciples in Galilee and who continues to share those same words with us who are his disciples today!

Ruby's story has inspired millions. Her six-year-old faith changed the world. **Ruby became famous, in part, because Dr. Coles wrote about her--told her story. Then Norman Rockwell painted her picture as she walked to school with the federal marshals, looking remarkably unperturbed. Then in 1986, Disney made a movie about her.**

But first God pruned her--and pruned her--and pruned her--so that she would bear much fruit. Indeed, she bore abundant fruit! Little six-year-old Ruby changed the world more in that year than most of us will change it in a lifetime. How did she do it? She kept her cool, you might say--and she did. But how did she keep her cool? She was able to keep her cool only because of her childlike faith in Jesus. She was able to keep her

cool because she was raised by parents who passed on their deep faith to her.

Or, as Jesus would put it in our Scripture text today, she abided in Jesus--and Jesus abided in her. Jesus was part of her life--as real to her as her father and mother. Jesus had said that we should pray for our enemies, so she prayed for her enemies every day.

“In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so prove yourselves to be my disciples” (v. 8). Indeed, as we abide in Jesus--and bear much fruit--and become his disciples--we glorify the Father. And through us, our God blesses the people and our God changes the world. Amen