

TEXT: John 15:1-8

TOPIC: With a vine metaphor, Jesus explains how the task of disciples is to stay connected and bear fruit.

SUBJECT: The impossible possibilities of life are reached when we stay connected to God, ourselves, and others.

TITLE: The Possible Impossibility

Earlier this week, I read something that truly moved me. For me, it represents the possible impossibility of recognizing how central our relationship with Jesus must be.

The story was about a young man who was living a directionless life. He weighed about 300 pounds, and he was going from dead-end job to dead-end job. He had no goals for the future. He was depressed and he didn't fit in. He was ready to give up.

After a series of personal events, he decided he wanted to be a Navy seal. The navy laughed at him because they believed he'd set an unreachable goal. When he caught a break and was allowed to join the seals, he was required to lose 100 pounds in 90 days. With effort and perseverance, the impossible possibility became an obsession to achieve his goals.

For all practical purposes, the impossible becomes possible when people are tended by the Gardener as part of that vine-branch relationship with Jesus. As branches, our task as the church is to be fruitful because connection with Christ is more important than anything else.

PRAYER

The hardest reality I believe any person ever faces is not so much seeing themselves and realizing how they aren't how God intended them to be. I think the hardest reality is stepping out of the shadows where they've been comfortably hiding, and choosing to live in the reality of the life that is.

This a fundamental point Jesus is making in our reading from John 15. Jesus is telling the disciples that faith changes, so it is imperative that they change when faith changes by remaining connected with him. The problem, I think, is that most people think faith always

remains the same, and if it does, I might be good to take a closer look at what kinda faith you have. Faith changes all the time and when it changes, sometimes people think they have to resist it. At other times people grieve because either they don't want to change with it or they grieve because it means living into the because they prefer the way life is rather than the future God has in mind. When people resist faith, they are essentially trying to make the possible impossible without realizing that an impossible faith is no faith at all. Faith always invites people toward possibility. That's why the Vinegrower trims the vine. It's why Jesus went from life to crucifixion to life. Whatever God removes is often what resists or inhibits growth.

For example, when I moved here last summer, I noticed there was an overgrown bush in the backyard that was difficult to mow around, so I got out my tools and trimmed it, and today it is as brilliant and beautiful as I ever imagined it could be. That's been the case when I've lived places where trees were trimmed of tangled or dead branches. Once removed, the trees have taken on new life.

Jesus is saying God does that with us.

When people move toward the possible impossibility, that's often when folks realize how God made a re-connection with us in Jesus' death and resurrection. We are to remain connected to the vine, and whatever is contrary to producing fruit, the master Gardener trims away. We are to remain connected to the vine because when we aren't, our lives are fruitless, so we let God trim the vine, so we can produce fruit that lasts. Fruit that lasts is the key. How we do that is a choice we make. One way the impossible becomes possible is when people remain connected with the Vine. Another way for the impossible to become possible is to be a seed that is planted in the soil that dies to itself, so it isn't just a single grain.

You choose how you let God manifest the possible impossibility in you.

One choice is to make your life in the vine the focus of who you are and what you do. Or, secondly, you are welcome to die and let something else – something committed to the possible impossibility – end up in the place of what could have been. I actually saw some of that happening this week as I've watched and followed the livestream and emails coming out of General Conference. God gives us the choice to be pruned or buried. I don't know about you, but I prefer to be pruned.

For all practical purposes, the possible impossibility doesn't all rest on our shoulders. The possible impossibility represents an interdependent partnership between the branches and the vine. The possible impossibility takes risks of faith as faith changes as it adapts to the mission field. The possible impossibility is either an intentional choice to remain connected to the Vine or to be buried and die. The possible impossibility means being uncomfortable letting the Gardener prune you, so you will produce more fruit. Once people grow into a changing faith, it becomes possible to inspire others to change, as well.

Giving up control requires risk of being exposed the way Eve and Adam were exposed. Giving up control means vulnerability and the vulnerability to love is what got Jesus crucified. Our culture has gotten to a point where it has convinced people that they shouldn't be vulnerable, but without vulnerability courage cannot exist, and without courage, healing cannot happen. As I understand scripture, Jesus' primary task was healing others and if that is good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me, and I would hope it's good enough for the church.

Healing frees us to see ourselves not as we've been told to be or in limiting, negative ways we've sometimes told ourselves; healing creates a way forward. Healing connects us and keeps us connected to the Vine.

The possible impossibility is always faith changing as it moves forward. The possible impossibility replaces the feeling of scarcity with abundance. The possible impossibility says if faith can change, people can change. The possible impossibility manifests whenever people need to realize in their walk of discipleship either requires being buried in the ground so something new can grow or it requires staying connected with the Vine so the fruit that's produced is Love. The possible impossibility has to do with the health of the Vine. The possible impossibility is the way of producing more fruit and the fruit, itself, is Love.

So let me say this, I love all y'all. Y'all have made me feel connected not only with our Lord, but also to our mission field and Love has been an anecdote for me. The way of the Vine – the way of Love – accepts there is much that must happen for the church to be a connecting point for the community. The way of the Vine – the way of Love – makes possible every impossibility people can dream up out of resistance, fear, conformity or laziness can be replaced with possibility.

Remember Jesus is the vine, and you are the branches, and the vine connects you to Love. It makes our mission together possible, and it makes possible any impossibility you might think you have.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.