

**The Fifth Sunday of Easter: Year B
and
The Feast of Sts. Philip and James
1 and 2 May 2021**

St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

By Zoom

Patricia Kay Jue, lay preacher



Pruning, and Living, Deeply Rooted with G-d¹

Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

Psalm 22:24-30

Jesus said to the disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.... Abide in me as I abide in you. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. - John 15: 1, 4

These past few years, and especially during this pandemic year when so much has been put on pause, I have been thinking a lot about cleaning and what is essential. Maybe you have been too. Last May, when cleaning high-touch surfaces seemed to be a priority, maybe you frantically cleaned everything. Then as the weather got warmer, maybe you moved outside, into the good, clean, fresh air.

I started to clean the house, which sort of means taking everything out of the drawers and boxes, to be sorted. And well, now there are semi-neat piles of sorted things all over my house. House cleaning has not been very successful.

We have been a little more successful with the outdoor spaces. Behind our house, beyond a little stream there is a bit of land that my spouse, David, and I call out "out- back". It used to be a horse pasture, but over the years it has been overrun with milkweed, Queen Anne's lace, goldenrod and bachelor buttons. The pine and spruce trees that we used to call our little outdoor Christmas trees now tower over us. The old cider apple trees mostly feed the deer, not us, and the wild grape vine compete with the wild rose bushes.

Last summer, David and I started working out back. I climbed the lower limbs of the apple trees to prune off the water sprouts and branches that crossed against each other. David, being more earth-bound, cut the heavier lower limbs. Together we used the saw to cut the larger pieces of deadwood into more manageable sizes, he at one end of the saw and I on the other.

We also tackled the wild grape vines, entangled among the bushes and trees. It was a different kind of pruning. With the apple trees, the tree trunk was very obvious. It was easy to tell the good wood from the deadwood, and which bits were just sapping energy out of the more healthy portions. But with the grapevine, everything was leafy green, sprawling, with promises of little grapes-to-be everywhere. While I had no fantasy that our grapes would ever produce fine wine, or really even tasty dessert snacks, I kept thinking about the grape plants I had seen in the Barossa Valley north of Adelaide, Australia, in the countryside of France, and closer to home, in the Finger Lakes region. Those grape plants had strong bases, with branches cut back severely. It is really easy to tell where those grape plants were rooted into the soil, sturdy, bountiful in their large fruit.

Our grapevines were entanglement, thin whip like things going every which way. I had to work really hard to trace the vines back to their roots. I started at the tip of one vine, roll it into a coil, walking, trying to find where everything began, getting tangled up, trying not to get distracted by other parts of the vine. There was lots of pruning, scrabbling around, reaching up, removing years' worth of growth. We got down to the main part of the grapevines, down to where they were anchored into the soil. Later in the summer, we were rewarded. The grapes were not exactly tasty sweet, but, at least they were something more than little pea sized: grapes worth gathering for jams, and sauces.

Jesus said "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower...Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit...Abide in me as I abide in you. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.

In May 160 years ago, a small group of people spent \$100 to have a fancy New York City architect design a church building for the little village of Clinton, New York.² The building was called St. James Episcopal Church, because it was mid-May and closest saint's day was the feast of Saints Philip and James.

Today is the Feast day of Saints Philip and James.³ And St. James Episcopal Church has become our spiritual home. It is where we come together, to praise G-d in corporate worship, to be renewed and to be strengthened. And although in this pandemic year we have learned we can gather as church without a building, we can't wait to back inside our little yellow building on Williams Street in mid-May: our spiritual home; our abode!

Abode. That's a strangely old timey word. Abode...Abide.

Abode, that earthly, deeply rooted place where we live.

Abide, living deeply with each other.

"Abide with me," says Jesus. "Be with me."

Jesus calls us to be continually in His Presence, consistently, deeply rooted.

We are to be grounded in the discipleship of Jesus, so that G-d's Word fills our minds and opens up our hearts. St. James Episcopal Church is to be rooted in Jesus, the one true vine.

"Abide with me" says Jesus. "G-d is love, and those who abide in love, abide in G-d, and G-d abides in them." writes the Apostle John.⁴

Abide, in Love! So as the great Christian song reminds us. "And they will know we are Christians by our Love." That we be known by our Love, by how we care for our neighbours, by how we walk with each other.

This pandemic year has brought into light so many things that we sort of knew in our minds, but maybe did not really fully grasp:

- Of what it really means to be housebound, and maybe with it, more compassion for those who are.
- Of the unequal access to basic medical care, and what this says about how we care for the most vulnerable.
- That our most essential workers are often the ones that are the least paid, and least protected;
- That the names George Floyd, Priscilla Slater, Adam Toledo, Allison Highwolf and Daoyou Feng call out, asking "do we love neighbours as ourselves?"⁵

As we look forward to regathering anew inside our little yellow building on Williams Street, our spiritual abode, my prayer for us, on this Feast of Saints Philip and James, is that we ask ourselves and each other, what needs more nurturing, what needs to be pruned so we can be more vibrant, where do we need to be more rooted in Jesus, our Redeemer.

In prayer, we remember these words:

Jesus said "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

"Those who abide in love abide in G-d, and G-d abides in them."

May the love, and righteousness of G-d be with us all.

AMEN

Image: Gravestone carved with a vine with grapes, St Quivox, South Ayrshire, Scotland. a part of the Art in the Christian Tradition digital image collection, Vanderbilt University, <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu//act-processquery.pl?code=ACT&SortOrder=Title&LectionaryLink=BEast05>

¹ This writer used G-d for the written name.

² Thank you to Donald Potter, and his compilation of the history of St. James for the 150 anniversary book " St. James' Episcopal Church Clinton, New York 1862-2012 A Sesquicentennial History 150th ANNIVERSARY, May 2012.

³ In the Episcopal Calendar the Feast of Saint Philip and Saint James falls on May 1.

⁴ C.f. 1 John 4: 14

⁵ George Floyd, black man, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota while being arrested on suspicion of using a counterfeit bill - May 25, 2020. The public airing of the video of his death lead to a change in how the United States sees Black Lives.

Priscilla Slater, a black women died in the Harper Woods jail, Michigan, bringing to light the unexplained and often unreported deaths of those incarcerated - June 10, 2020.

Adam Toledo, a 13-year old Latino boy, highlights the number of young people, especially those of color, killed in the line of fire -March 20, 2021

Allison Highwolf, a Northern Cheyenne mother, of Hardin, Montana, reminds us that Native Americans, especially the women, have the largest percentage of unreported and unnamed murders and abductions by those outside their group than any other demographic in the US.- Feb 23, 2020

Daoyou Feng, a Chinese national, was murdered in an Asian Hate Crime. Like many new Americas, she worked many hours at a low wage job with no benefits and little protection. She regularly sent money to her widowed mother and siblings. In keeping with her village's custom, she is buried in the city where she died, alone, in a country where she has no relatives. She reminds us of Leviticus 19:34 - February 23, 2021