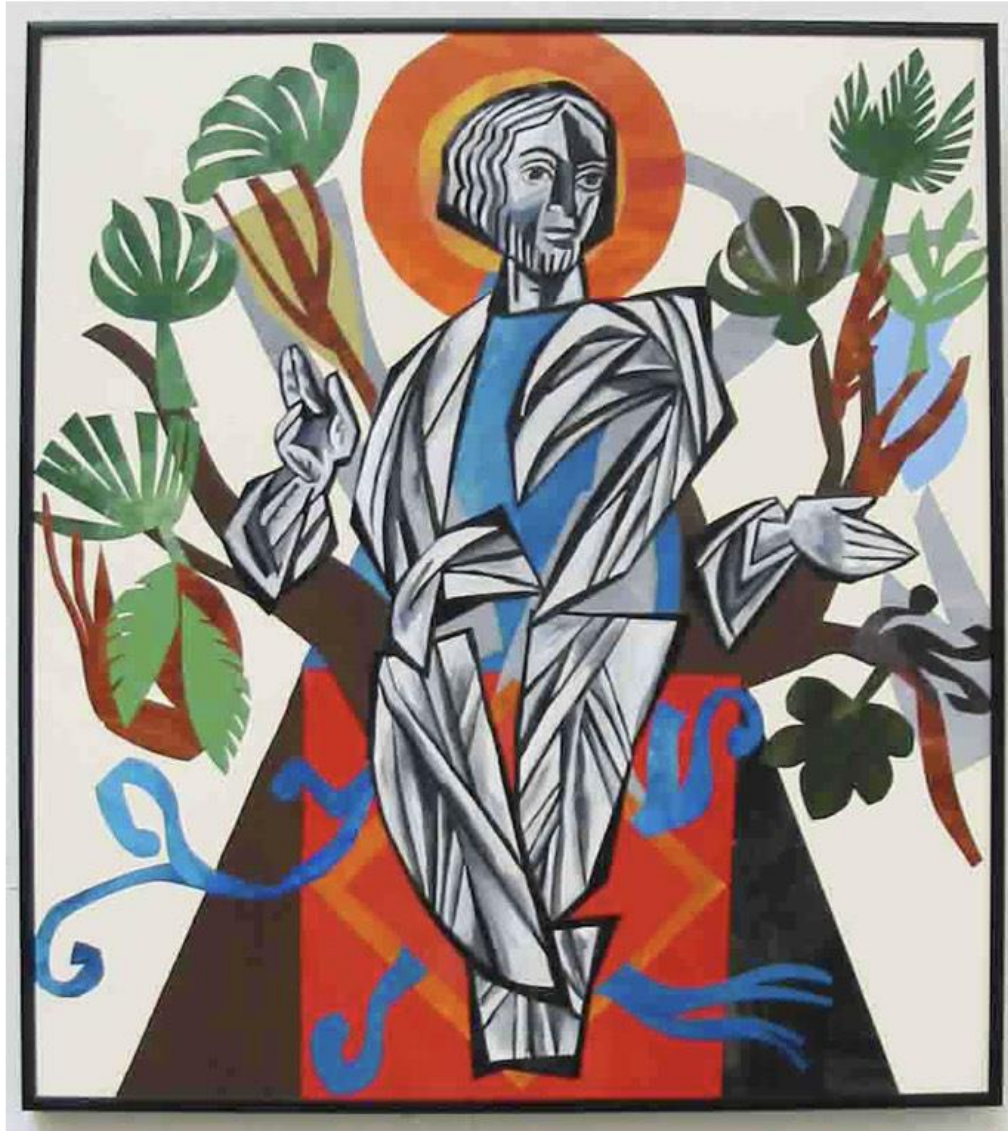


FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 2nd, 2021



CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

140 Russell Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 1W1
Church: 905-685-8294 Fax 905-685-7661
www.christlutheransc.ca

Pastor: Pastor Todd Hoeffs pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com
Parish Assistant: Louise Gondosch parish.assistant@christlutheransc.ca

Office Hours: Tuesday to Friday—9 a.m. – 12 noon

Bulletin Announcements: Please send to secretary@christlutheransc.ca.
Deadline for submission is Thursday at 9 a.m.

Pastor:	Pastor Todd Hoeffs	(289-362-0113)	pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com
Parish Assistant:	Louise Gondosch	(905-329-8579)	parish.assistant@christlutheransc.ca
Business Manager:	Karen McCumber		business.manager@christlutheransc.ca
Secretary:	Pat Kimpel		secretary@christlutheransc.ca
SOUL Ministry:	Trinda Rensen/Gillian Leaver		
Facebook:	Lisa Gall		www.facebook.com/ChristLutheranChurchSC
Bulletin by email:	Judy Mason		chairman.outreach@christlutheransc.ca

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Prayer: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will; therefore grant to Your people that they may love what You command and desire what You promise, that among the manifold changes of this age our hearts may ever be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday Musician: Mayumi Munoz
Sunday Reader: Howard Bogusat

Sunday School: "Ascension" <https://youtu.be/VwoIDhkALfE>
Precious Moments: "Phillip" https://youtu.be/UczC_NHVqHc
Children's Message: "The Vine": <https://youtu.be/9qiGdJ9c49A>

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS:

Monday: Eph.5: 8-14	Wed.: Col. 3: 16-24	Friday: 11 Tim. 2: 8-13
Tuesday: John 6: 66-69	Thurs: Matt. 21: 12-17	Saturday: 1 Sam. 16: 14-23

WORSHIP NOTE: Until May 20, Sunday Worship Service will be:

- **live-streamed at 10 AM** on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ChristLutheranChurchSC>).
- Following the service, a recording will be uploaded to YouTube – "Gathering the Scattered" at: (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3a4p6prdJGEyP5S-q-cNSq>).
- A PDF version of the order of service for each Sunday will also be posted on our church website: christlutheransc.ca.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Judy Slingerland or Pastor Todd or phone the church office.
May the peace of the risen Lord be with you all.

MOTHER'S DAY REQUEST: As we come upon Mother's Day soon, I'd like your help on a project to make the day a bit more special. Please send a photo of your mom (and with an young version of yourself) and a brief line about "what you love about your mom" or "what you remember about her".
That's a picture; A brief sentiment; Her name (and yours).
For the young moms, please try to get in all your kids if you can.
These will be put onto PowerPoint slides with the help of our worship team and added to the Mother's Day live-stream church service as a tribute for all to see. These will also be added to the service for YouTube as well so if these images online concern you, please let me know.
Since Mother's Day this year is at lockdown time, what better way for us at Christ Lutheran (our mother church in St. Catharines) to honour all of our women!
Deadline for submitting this: Tuesday, May 4th!
Please send picture & your brief sentiment to pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com.
Any questions or concerns, please let me know.
Your servant in Christ.
Pastor Todd

Rev. Dr. Roger Winger entered into his eternal rest this past week. Please hold the Winger family in prayer as they make plans for a funeral, which are unclear at this time.

Last Sunday Attendance: April 25th, 2021 10 a.m. – 10

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Weekly Need</u>	<u>Last Sunday</u>	<u>Year To Date</u>	<u>+ or - (-)</u>
Current:	271,175.00	5,214.90	4,439.00	55,280.69	(22,618.90)
Missions	20,000.00	384.62	587.00	4,935.00	(449.62)
Property Improvement:			407.00	1,786.50	

FLOWERS have been placed on the altar this morning to the glory of God by Tom & Mary Saxton on the occasion of Tom's Birthday.

FLOWERS FOR ALTAR: If you would like to place flowers on the altar, please sign your name at the back of the church or email: secretary@christlutheransc.ca. Cost is \$25/bouquet

COLLECTION NOTE: At this point we are not collecting any materials for the church. This means no milk bags for making mats; no SOUL bingo prizes; no Christmas cards for Sunday School or SOUL; no puzzles for exchange, etc. Thank you.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHURCH DURING THE PANDEMIC: It's important for members to keep in mind that expenses for payroll, utilities, maintenance, etc. continue to accumulate even when you are not comfortable attending service.

1. THROUGH EFT DONATIONS: Lutheran Church - Canada, East District Corporation continues to facilitate this service for us. To assist you in continuing your financial support to your church, we encourage you to fill out the form that is available for printing at: http://christlutheransc.ca/?page_id=96 and then mail the form along with a voided cheque to:

Lutheran Church - Canada, East District Corporation,
275 Lawrence Ave., Kitchener, ON N2M 1Y3
Attn: Darryll Holland

2. BY MAIL: cheques can still be mailed to:

Christ Lutheran Church
140 Russell Ave. St. Catharines, ON L2R 1W1

or dropped in the Church mailbox at the East entrance.

3. ONLINE VIA LUTHERAN CHURCH-CANADA: Lutheran Church-Canada has opened a web portal that allows parishioners to donate directly to their home church:

<https://lutheranchurch-canada.tng-secure.com/?pageId=donation-edit&categoryId=10972>

select "St. Catharines-Christ Lutheran-30950" from the drop down menu, enter the amount of your donations and LCC will transfer your donation to Christ. Donation is via VISA or Mastercard. Tax receipts will be issued by LCC (not Christ). This opportunity will be in effect until the COVID-19 emergency is over.

PLEASE NOTE: The March and April 2021 copy of The Canadian Lutheran is now available at the church.

If you would like to read it online, go to: WWW.CANADIANLUTHERAN.CA

And scroll down and click: The Canadian Lutheran Online

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

The 5th Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021 + 10 AM Blended Lockdown

OPENING HYMN: "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" (LSB # 469 Vs. 1, 4 & 5)

1 'Christ, the Lord, is risen today!'

All on earth with angels say!

Raise your joys and triumphs high;

Sing, you heavens, and earth reply.

4 Lives again our glorious King; where,

O death, is now your sting?

**Once he died, our souls to save; where's
your victory, O grave?**

6 Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!

Praise to you by both be given; every

knee to you shall bow,

risen Christ, triumphant now!

Jubilate Hymns version of 'Christ the Lord is risen today,' , Charles Wesley (1707 - 1788) © Jubilate Hymns Ltd

CONFESSION OF SINS FROM THE PSALMS & FORGIVENESS

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

PSALM OF THE DAY Psalm 22: 26-30

All those who seek him shall praise the Lord.

May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; **and all**

the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, **and**

he rules over the nations.

Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about the Lord,

and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,

saying that he has done it.

Friends in Christ: our Lord Jesus said to the apostles: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' Therefore, let us confess our sins to God our Father and ask him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

[Brief silence for prayerful reflection]

Remember Your mercy, O LORD, and Your never ending love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my rebellious ways; according to Your merciful love remember me and remove my guilt. I acknowledge my sin to You, and I do not cover up my wrongdoing; there is nothing good in me; there is no health in my bones; For my sinful ways have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. I confess my selfish ways; I am sorry for all I have done wrong. Will You be angry forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? Show me Your never ending love, O LORD, and give me Your salvation. Blessed is the one whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (Ps. 25, 32, 38 & 85)

Receive the forgiveness Christ has won for you by His Passion, death and resurrection. In the place of Christ and by His Holy Command I therefore forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

SPOKEN KYRIE

O Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us and give us Your peace. Amen.

EASTER HYMN OF PRAISE "Splendour and Majesty" (Tune: Jesus Christ is Ris'n Today)

**Splendor, majesty and honour: Alleluia! Be to You,
Lord God of power: Alleluia!
Your creation joins in praise! Alleluia
As Your wisdom guides our days.
Alleluia!**

**Praise the Lamb, for us is offered; Alleluia
Prophet, Priest and King Who suffered; Alleluia!
Now He shepherds from His throne! Alleluia!
Whom we adore and Him alone! Alleluia!**

Carl P. Daw. b. 1944 © Hope Publishers 1990 alt.

GREETING & PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you:

And also with you.

O Father, form the minds of Your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what You teach and desire what You promise, that, amid all the changes of this life, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found. We ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

THE WORD

The First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8: 26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.' The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized? He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The Epistle: 1 John 4:1-11

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus does away with Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. This is the Word of the Lord. This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SUNG GOSPEL ACCLAMATION "Alleluia! Jesus is Risen"

**Jesus the Vine, we are the branches, Life in the Spirit, the fruit of the Tree;
Heaven to earth, Christ to the people, gift of the future now flowing to me:
Jesus is risen and we shall arise, give God the glory Alleluia!**

The Holy Gospel: St. John 15:1-8

The Holy Gospel, according to St. John, the 15th chapter:

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus says:] 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life + everlasting. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

"I Am The Holy Vine"

LOVE UNKNOWN

**I am the holy vine, which God my Father tends.
Each branch that yields no fruit my Father cuts away.
Each fruitful branch he prunes with care to
make it yield abundant fruit.**

**If you abide in me, I will in you abide.
Each branch to yield its fruit must with the vine be one.
So you shall fail to yield your fruit if
you are not with me one vine.**

**I am the fruitful vine, and you my branches are.
If you abide in me, I will in you abide.
So shall you yield much fruit, but none
if you remain apart from me.**

James Quinn, S.J., ©. 1969 Scottish Selah Publishing Co., Inc., Pittsburgh, Pa., 15227, North American agent.
LOVE UNKNOWN John Ireland tune

MESSAGE

THE PRAYERS

Heavenly Father, with joy the Church continues to celebrate the resurrection victory of Your beloved Son. Look in Your mercy on all who have been baptized into His death and resurrection, and grant them grace each day to die to sin and rise to newness of life with Him. Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Fountain of mercy, You call Your people to love and serve those in need. Pour out Your blessing on all the mercy ministries of Christ's Church, that many may come to know and praise Your unspeakable kindness and love. Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

King of kings and Lord of lords, to You we commend our public servants in this land. Bless and prosper them in their callings. Hinder everything in our common life that is contrary to Your will, and establish and strengthen every good endeavor.

Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Lord of kindness and compassion, Your Son throughout His ministry healed the sick and relieved the distressed. Remember in tenderness those who are in need of His healing and comfort today [especially _____]. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, give them grace to entrust themselves entirely to Your loving care. Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Bountiful Provider, we pray for the whole Church on earth and for all pastors, teachers, deaconesses, musicians and servants of Christ's people, that the Holy Spirit would give us the joy of singing the new song, a hymn of resurrection victory in Christ, our Savior, Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Guiding Fire & Sheltering Cloud, be the strong arm of safety for travellers, the comfort of the lonely and afflicted, those addicted, for mourners, and all who have need that you continually nourish, sustain and restore them; Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Giver of the life that never ends, receive today our heartfelt thanks for all Your servants who have departed this life in saving faith and who live in You forevermore. In Your boundless love, bring us with them to share in the joys of the new heavens and the new earth. Praying for mercy;

Hear us, O God, Alleluia!

Heavenly Father, help all who now celebrate these joyful holy days here on earth to finally praise you forever, with all the angels and saints in heaven. We ask this through your risen Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

CLOSING EASTER PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, set Your cross and empty grave in our hearts and minds, now, and in the hour of our death and promise to safely give us grace and mercy: that we may have forgiveness and holy pardon, and for Your Church, instill peace and unity, and unto all redeemed children life and glory everlasting, Who lives and rules as one God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

GREETING & BLESSING

Let us praise the Lord:

Thanks be to God

May the God of peace, Who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, equip you with everything good for doing His will. And the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son + and Holy Spirit, be with you always.

Amen

SENDING HYMN

"O Blessed Spring"

LSB # 595

1. O blessed Spring, where Word and sign Embrace us into Christ the Vine: Here Christ enjoins each one to be A branch of this life-giving Tree.

**2. Through summer heat of youthful
years, Uncertain faith, rebellious tears,
Sustained by Christ's infusing rain,
The boughs will shout for joy again.**

**3. When autumn cools and youth is
cold, When limbs their heavy harvest
hold,
Then through us, warm, the Christ will move
With gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.**

**4. As winter comes, as winters must,
We breathe our last, return to dust;
Still held in Christ, our souls take wing
And trust the promise of the spring.**

**5. Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,
Be praised for this blest mystery:
That Word and water thus revive
And join us to your Tree of Life.**

Words: Susan Palo Cherwien © 1993 Augsburg Fortress 1993.

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Welcome & Announcements

Let us go forth in the peace and joy of Easter! **Thanks be to God.**

REV. TODD HOEFFS

EASTER 5

Scripture: St. John 15:1-8

May 2, 2021

The Niagara Region is great for Jesus' teaching on Vine & Branches.

Vineyards are all around us.

Driving past the vines you can see evidence of new growth after the winter pruning.

It's nice to see all the spring renewal.

We're seeing for the 1st time in our new yard all the plants, tulips, daffodils, choke weed...even a few things we're unsure of.

Growth and life flow from Jesus' Vine and Branches story.

The interconnectedness of the branches with the Vine shows how much our growth depends on Jesus and on staying connected to each other.

When my friends in Seminary class got ready to depart for our vicarage year, we golfed 9 holes, ate lunch, bottled our own wine at a local winery and then drank a toast to the future success of where we were headed.

At that time, we knew we were in it together and yet still had to depend on God and grow in His Son. We live in an interconnected world.

Even more so now after a year of pandemic and now in lockdown.

You connect on Facebook with your friends. Facetime. Instagram.

The Internet connects us in so many ways beyond just social networks.

Now more than ever our shopping, banking, doctoring, eating, our schooling-- is dependent upon Wi-Fi.

In this interconnected world we can lose track of the most important connection of all.

The connection to Christ. The connection every person of the world desperately needs, even if they don't know it.

And through His grace we're interconnected to each other which goes above and beyond internet. As we share a interconnected faith, Which we talk about in the Creed

Enjoying a real holy communion. Jesus is the Vine; we are the branches.

That's the image of interconnectedness with our God.

And why it's so important staying connected to Him. And why is this connection so important?

Is it so we'll all go to Heaven when we die? Well, that's true and it is our lasting hope.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the only path from death to life.

For anyone not connected to Jesus --dies. Like a dead branch, dries up, withers away, gets cut off, thrown into the fire and burned. Separated from God's love and cut off from all hope.

Total aloneness and utter desolation. But if anyone thinks getting to heaven someday is the only reason for staying connected to Jesus, then that faith could quickly dry up.

For that's a life lived really only for a personal, self-concerned reason.

The Christian faith is lived for serving others in Jesus' name – feeding on the Vine, not to hoard, but to share – like sharing and living the message of the Gospel, which is a full, rich, nourished, forgiven life.

While heaven is the prize, all believers are called to stay connected to the Vine in the here and now. And that means living for Him. Receiving His gifts.

Worshipping Him. Trusting Him. Following Him

By helping others –which shows Jesus' face to those in need of hope.

Which is why healthy branches get pruned. Branches tend to grow wild and rebelliously. (just like we sinners do) They need to be cut back,

as overgrown branches can get too far away from the True Vine. They get tangled and get so thick they can no longer grow. So, they get cut back. Growing wild is often mistaken for being productive. We're used to being a people of productivity. Now it's a bit on idle, but we still crave busyness. It is, for the most part, the standard by how we live and measure our success. It's built into who we are as people. Producers are rewarded and get more. When we aren't productive enough, we feel lazy, purposeless, aimless. Those who do not produce are thrown out. Professors know well the saying, "Publish or perish." Many careers and promotions are usually based on productivity. Productivity at some level is at the core of the debates around poverty, welfare, healthcare, and the elderly. Those who don't produce are often marginalized and neglected. Most people's productivity is based working at home. Which makes us look at growth differently---These days most of us feel our energies are more dormant than productive. Its concerning that peoples' spiritual lives may also become more dormant or even wander too far from the Vine of Christ. How will faith branches get pruned back so that they continue to grow? Rather than worrying we're too busy in our faith life we all run the risk of depression, hopelessness and a much more saddened view of our Lord's Vineyard. All branches need pruning. All branches connected to the Vine have the blessing to grow and flourish. Only those without fruit Who won't grow, Who delight in being away from Vine of our Lord, Who can live life just fine without Him They get cut off and thrown away. I remember trimming an old cabbage rose bush. There was so much dead wood when I finished pruning, only about 3 original branches remained. But it grew well the next summer. full of buds and then beautiful, deep pink cabbage roses. For it's not in the producing, the busyness --but in the fruits. It's about being our best as branches of the Vine and stepping out in faith in the Lord's name. Being connected brings growth. And that's God's work. Productivity alone does not create fruit. Nor does being dormant and hidden. Jesus is not demanding productivity any more than He is rewarding a separate, underground life, Alone and off to ourselves. Rather Jesus desires our necessary connected lives to Him and to each other. Without Him, apart from the Vine, We can do nothing. Having fruit grow or not is a manifestation of our interior life and health. It describes and reveals whether we're living to Christ or to ourselves. Fruit production is the wonderful consequence of staying connected. You can see that in long-term friendships, marriages, community loyalty. We do not choose whether or not we produce fruit. We do not choose to be part of the Vine. But we can choose to grow apart, away from this life. Sometimes we lose touch with a person. We no longer know where he or she is, what they're doing, or what's happening in their life. One day we run into him or her. It's a bit awkward. No one is sure what to say. There's not much to talk about. Maybe there's no real connection anymore? I have a few friends who live in other parts of the world. I can talk to them after years passing and we just pick up where we left off like picking up a book and reading on from the bookmark. There was and remains a connection and mutual concern that time, distance, and the circumstances of life cannot sever.

That's the deep, abiding, quiet yet firm connection, created by Christ and His constant presence in our lives. Abiding in Christ is where we depend on Him for everything!

Everything

Every breath

Every good work

Every blessing

Every help

It's a quality life, not a quantity life.

It's not how much I have to do but what is God calling me into.

What gets thrown in my path that makes me pause, pray, trust and walk firmly in Christ as His servant. It's His loving embracing connected way He moves us to join with Him,

in Him, to live fully alive. Fully alive means living for others, caring for someone else's needs ahead of your own. And not expecting anything in return.

That only happens when the life, the love, and the goodness and holiness of Christ flow in us. When His crucified and risen life are transforming our ways of viewing the world.

We become an extension of and an image of his life, love, and holiness.

It's about being satisfied as a branch of the vine with other branches.

While we are many branches, we are connected as one. We live our lives as one.

This is not just about relationship with Jesus;

It's the basis for our relationships with each another.

Love for Jesus, one another, and ourselves, become one love.

And we love solely because God in Christ first loved us.

Because Christ turned the wretched Vine of death, overgrown by the sins of the world, dried out, cut off, into a living Vine of Life.

A living tree – His own blood soaked cross.

He's already done the hard work of growing and feeding and living to perfection.

He took our every sin with him to the cross.

He took us like dead wood in sin and grafted us into His tree by blood, water and word.

He took us with our inborn rot and washed us clean through Baptism.

He took us wild branches, rebellious against God, and made us grow into himself, the true Vine. Through his death, we all have His life. We are renewed, transformed, fully renovated and restored. This is a gift from God. We didn't earn it. We can't pay for it. We can't just think it will magically appear. We grow up into Him. He partners with us in our daily work.

We are bold growing witnesses of His merciful love. With forgiveness comes gratitude and the will to do all we can and be all we can for the benefit of all people.

We begin with the Word. Letting the Scriptures and prayers shape and feed us.

And that takes time, and practice and habit. That's an investment of nurturing our growth in the Vine. It feeds our trust that if you recall nothing else from the Bible, it's that God keeps His

promises. As He keeps them with you. As you are all here, branches of the Vine, living in an intimate and sustaining presence, a serene sense of "connectedness" with the will and the work of Jesus. Our connection comes with fruit. At times being fruitful can seem such an impossible stretch.

We feel so needy. Our faith can feel so insignificant, so powerless. But we're not on our own.

That's the beauty of being a branch. Over time we draw health and vigor from the vine.

With the turn of each season, the fruits of grace and peace abide within us....

Faith knows that we always have room to grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and the works that follow.

There's never too much fruit. Faith always has fruit, even when we don't know we have any.

The fruit of the Vine carrying Jesus to your lips also feeds this connectedness. The juice of grapes made into vintage wine remains a fortified liquid refreshment of celebration and nourishment.

Jesus makes sure your daily Bread is secure, in your physical meals connecting to family and in the spiritual food connecting you as one family with all other believing branches around the world.

Connection.

We need it.

From Jesus.

From each other.

A steady, protective abiding presence Jesus promises. In a time when faith connections to the church and to other Christians and to all others in the world in a public way is fading, may we remain active branches showing our connected growth to the world.

Abiding. Living. Feeding. Growing. Fruitful. Faithful. Forever on the Vine.

Amen.