

I have learned so much as a person and a pastor here in Fannett. What a blessing that is and a reminder that we are all called to keep learning and growing. I'm reflecting on that now as we hear Jesus say, "I am the true vine." I confessed to you when I got here that I was not good with growing things. I had decided that it was not part of who God made me to be and was okay with that. Are there things in your life that you have decided you're not good at and therefore, don't try anymore? Me, too! I'm not sure when and where this came to be but some how we've cultivated an environment that does not welcome us to try. I don't know exactly why. Is it because we are risk adverse? And by risk adverse I really mean failure adverse? We don't want to fail. Is it because we don't want to hurt?

I knew that I was not a good gardener. I killed nearly everything I ever tried to grow. I'm not even sure at what point I simply resigned myself to not even trying again, but I did. That relates to our Gospel reading today because I did not always understand the many gardening metaphor's Jesus used. Not only is Jesus talking about things growing he says that "He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." I did not understand this, why did you cut it no matter if it had fruit or didn't have fruit. Wasn't pruning & removing the same thing?

I've learned a lot about growth and growing things. Nearly every parsonage we've lived in had yard to care for but I didn't have the knowledge. I remember one particular parsonage that was on the Azalea Trail and I was terrified that I would ruin it. I've often plead my ignorance and asked others to care for them or tell me exactly what and when to do it. But something changed

when I got here. Waiting for me when I arrived, was a beautiful indoor plant that I was sure I would kill because I'd even killed aloe. But I didn't. I planted fruit trees, gardenias and roses. Last year, I had herbs and a butterfly garden as well as what we had planted before. I just kept working at it. By last fall, I began looking more closely at what was around. We are blessed to have several beautiful Crepe Myrtles around the parsonage and I realized we did not have the same amount of flowers and leaves as before. I began reading and learned that they are supposed to be pruned every year. Well, I know I had anything in my 4 Springs now and after learning much more about the trees, they have not been pruned in many years. I kept reading, asking questions and finally after the freeze and A&M ag department said the time was right, I began carefully pruning.

But as I did I began to think I was ruining the tree. I began to think of all the ways my mistakes would be taken by the church folks in Liberty. I began regretting my decision to try and do this. When my children came home and saw all of the branches down, there was a collective uproar. Why would I kill that tree. And do you know what came to mind, our Gospel reading this morning. The crepe myrtle could not continue to bear the flowers because its resources were being stretched too far. And what's more, it was not able to get the proper airflow through the branches because it was overgrown. And the more we talked the more I understood what Jesus was trying to teach the disciples and in turn us.

As we began Lent, 4 weeks ago, some of us had a bad case of I don't want toos. We talked about all the reasons we could not even begin to stomach another round of self-denial. And yet, here

we are 4 weeks later and the realization that if we are to grow we have to let go of some things in our lives. Not only does God need to prune us so that we can grow, we have to abide with God and each other. Abiding in God makes us interconnected in ways we do not always want to acknowledge because of the ways in which we have learned it's just me and Jesus. But that is not the Gospel. Did you catch it – branches are plural. It can't be just me and Jesus, it has to be us and Jesus.

We've learned a lot in the last year about how interconnected are lives really are. What we do, or don't do, have implications for our community. It's hard to unlearn or relearn to do things differently. It's hard to see the ways in which we've failed and then how do we move forward. This time last year, I had moved the plant that had so generously been gifted to be when I arrived home, so I could care for it. And I did, until the freeze. I'd pulled it up close to the house, covered it but it wasn't enough. It is dead. The guilt began but it stopped when I reminded myself that I had kept it alive longer than any other plant I had ever had. It made it through Harvey, Imelda and almost through the pandemic. It taught me where it liked to live, how much water and gave me confidence that I could grow things. I let go of the guilt and have begun thinking of what I can put in the pot, after I take the dead vines & roots out of the soil.

How are we abiding in with Jesus, the true vine? How are we letting God, the vine-grower pruning us for new growth or removing dead branches that are taking up our energy? How we shape our lives, what we give priority to has great impact, not just for our individual or family lives but for our church community, the greater Hamshire-Fannett community, our county, state,

country and world. In this season of preparation for Easter, we are called to let God work in our hearts and minds so that when Easter comes, new life is budding all around. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.