

## **May 5 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Year B 2024**

All throughout the gospel of John, Jesus provides descriptions of himself that guide, benefit, and inspire. They are called the “I am” sayings. They include:

I am the bread of life, light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life, and finally the descriptor from this morning’s passage is, “I am the true vine”. Jesus is true in the sense of real, authentic, and tangible. Jesus is the vineyard; God is the vineyard owner, and we are the vines in that vineyard. From the holy soil of the words and work of Jesus, we draw life and life abundant, so real that it is joyous. This spring, due to the incredible amount of rain, flowers have bloomed beautifully, and we will bloom in the Lord’s and look as joyous and radiant as the wonderful spring flowers. He says that we are clean, which could mean justified and forgiven through the word which he has given the disciple.

At this point in the Gospel, if you have listened to the complex sayings of Jesus, if you are still hanging in there, you have been changed. Those who have fallen away can do nothing, but those who “remain”, abide, or “hang out” with Jesus can and will bear fruit. Jesus gives a stunning promise, “If you remain in my words, ask whatever you wish and it shall be granted, for it glorifies me if you bear much fruit”. This seems incomprehensible. However, to remain in close fellowship with Jesus is to want what he wants and to desire what he desires. Bearing fruit blossoms from a deep love; love is the soil in which works of justice and mercy grow. The anti-slavery poem used for the Preparation for worship today is based on this chapter of John. Recognizing the love of Christ inspired William

Cowper to an abolitionist position. As Jesus says, “If you remain in my commandments your joy will be made complete”. The primary commandment is to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Our Lord demonstrates this in two ways: first, he lays down his life for us. He gives of himself to us so completely and fully that at the end of passion week he forfeits his life; and second, he withholds nothing from us. Jesus says that we are no longer servants, for we are no longer in the dark about what he is doing. We are his friends. Here is something that is true: you become a lot like the friends you hang out with. If we hang out with Jesus, we will become more like him, that is, we will grow to love him and love each other.

This week I was in a coffee shop and like a good Santa Cruz-an, I brought my own cup, which was emblazoned with the Princeton Seminary Logo. The fellow behind me in line said that his Dad was a theologian who attended Southwestern Seminary. He asked me my denomination; I replied Presbyterian. He then replied, surprisingly, “That is the coolest word ever, can’t it be a verb like to Presbyter. I thought this was related to a word like Buccaneer. But then I thought it might be a title like the Three Musketeers. The group that practiced love for one another with their famous motto, “All for one and one for All”, which really captures this passage. Then it hit me. Our church family should be called, instead of the Three Musketeers, the Trinity Presbyterians, because we have shown that deep love for each other and our community that springs from the soil of God’s own love for us.