

Remaining in Christ: Jesus' "I AM" Statements in the Gospel of John

Session VIII:

Notes on the Teaching

The True Vine (John 15:1-17)

In the video that accompanies this session, we speak about the importance of the themes of *friendship* and *abiding* in the Gospel of John, especially toward the end of the Gospel, as Jesus begins to speak of his leave-taking. Here, we concentrate on two related themes: community and the moral life.

The Vine: a community of love.

- I once heard someone say in an offhand way that Jesus is always talking about himself in the Gospel of John. And it might look that way on the surface. After all, we are spending eight weeks talking about the "I AM" sayings in the Gospel of John. But if you dwell with these sayings over time, you will gradually come to see that each one has the capacity to draw you not only toward Jesus, but deeper into community with all who follow him.
- That fact is especially clear this week, in the image of the vine. When Jesus tells his disciples that he is the vine and they are the branches, he draws them simultaneously into his life and closer to each other, a single organism growing together. Love is the energy that flows through this plant, bringing life from one part to another.
- The point is that salvation is not a solo sport, not an achievement of an individual person. To be a Christian is to take one's part in a community of people and to abide with them over time, learning how to love one another when loving is easy and also when loving is hard.

The Moral Life: the consequence of being loved

- In the last paragraph of the scripture above, Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." In essence, Jesus is calling each of us to grow up in our discipleship. There is a point in children's maturation when the parents begin to expect them to know what to do without being told. As they move into adulthood, children develop the capacity to fully internalize the values of their parents, and together they become more like friends than parents and children.
- As adults, then, we are expected to "bear fruit" worthy of disciples of Jesus, fruit that shows that we are his friends. If it were easy to do this, or if it just naturally happened, Jesus wouldn't have

had to teach it to his disciples, and they would not have passed the teaching on to us. So, clearly, it can be hard to bear the fruit of discipleship in the world.