

Lent Day 29

Monday March 19, 2018

Reading: John 15:1-17

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Reflection

The metaphor is clear enough. It's organic, for the branches to live and produce fruit they need to stay rooted in the vine itself. If the branches don't stay attached to the vine they will die. So far, so good. But things begin to break down here; Jesus then applies it to his disciples and himself. Jesus himself is the vine, we are the branches, so to live and bear fruit we must remain in him. I can picture the vine, the branch and the fruit, but what does it look like for us to remain in Jesus?

The consequences of failing to remain in Jesus are clear enough — we'll die and we'll bear no fruit. Again, what does it look like? I don't think there is a clear picture for us to go on — that is the benefit and downfall of metaphor — but it speaks to staying in proximity to Jesus. How do we do that? Many Evangelicals want to promote a lover-like relationship with Jesus, i.e. Jesus is my boyfriend type language, but this often turns into a one sided relationship that's hard to keep up. I think remaining in Jesus is tied up to what he says next for his disciples to love one another. The community and the worshiping actions of the community seems to be the heart of what it means to keep Christ's commandments.

Yet, for me, the bigger issue is what is implicit in this text; there is a way to uproot ourselves. May be even more, there is a proclivity to do so. When we think about it, it seems as crazy as separating an arm for no good reason — we may still have the arm, but it will not be useful for our work. But, while we would never willingly remove that arm, we seem to be quite willing to uproot from life in Christ. We seem to think we can go it alone, whether it's “Jesus yes, church no” or a casual loose relationship with a Christ community. How long does it take for a severed arm to begin decaying? How long does it take our spiritual lives to dry out? I know we want a fruitful life, but sometimes we have magical thinking — life without the body of Christ is life without Christ and it's a death sentence.

Prayer

Giver of life, help us to abide in you. Grant us a desire for your community. Let your life flow in us and bear the fruit you desire. Amen.