

***Beloved. Be Loved. Be Love.***

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

I am the vine and you are the branches. These “I Am” statements from Jesus are unique to the storyteller John. I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35), I am the Light of the World (8:12), I am the Door (10:9), I am the Good Shepherd (10:11-14), I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25), I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (14:6). Of course these are metaphors, but they offer a glimpse for the disciples, and us, into the relationship between Jesus and God – Christ and Creator. They are promises to all of us who want to follow, of the gift offered to us, especially in the most challenging times of our lives.

In John’s gospel, Jesus is beginning to say farewell to his friends beginning in chapter 14, and the disciples are getting anxious. The famous passage – in my Father’s house are many rooms... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself. There are difficult times ahead, but Jesus invites those worried men and women around him to have the courage to believe, and to abide in him – to stay close. I am the vine, and you are the branches.

Notice that of all those “I am” statements, this is the only one that includes a “you are...” piece. As Christ and Creator are in relationship, so also we are invited into that relationship. Abide with me. You are my beloved. You are my beloved. You are my beloved. There is a flow in that relationship – like the flow of nutrients in an organism like a tree. We are beloved, but we are created to be love, to continue the flow of love within, and without.

Biologists are still learning new things about trees. There are the beginnings of understanding of how trees might communicate with one another via the root systems. That connectivity is quite an evolution from the early scientific revolution when science did not see the environment, Creation, holistically. I hear the hymn in my mind as I talk about trees and Creation communicating:

And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,  
And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,  
And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,  
While you go out with joy. (“You Shall Go Out with Joy” VU 884)

I think we all are grieving the massive suffering and loss of life in Gaza, Sudan and in Haiti, as well as the Ukraine, being pummeled by Russia – all caused by human malice. Of course, while all this is going on, technology, with all its wonderful blessings, unfortunately connects us – it feels sometimes – too symbiotically with the pain of so many around our world. I don’t know about you, but I am feeling anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and back to anger – too often wondering, “What can I do?”

Here is my answer to that voice of anxiety in me – first of all, it is okay and natural to feel anger. I am seeing all the American College campuses emotionally charged by protests, and calls for boycott and divestment of Israel. It might be time for the world to consider boycotting Israel as it did South Africa decades ago, in order to force a ceasefire and, finally some earnest efforts towards a peace agreement.

But I also hear a rise in antisemitism, some relishing the thought of Israel's destruction. Hate has no place in God's vision of the kingdom, Israel must have its place alongside an autonomous nation of Palestine. We must pray for and work for, also, a government with authority enough to bring order and peace and justice in Haiti. And those two warring factions in Sudan, we must pray and work towards all work that might lay a basis for compromise and peace, the military leaders seeing how their own people are on the verge of a catastrophic famine. Ah, if only we could offer ourselves as peace envoys. Truth is, we are the support team, and there are great people working on the ground in all those countries.

We can, however, pray. We can continue to be aware of our global neighbourhood, prayerfully, always remembering that our power is in our symbiotic relationship with Christ and Creator, and also connected, feeling the pain of our global neighbours.

Oh, and one other thing we can do, we can continue to be generous. Generous in our words and actions – never accepting hatred of any sort, only love love love, even love for bullies. Jesus tells us that. And when our hearts are broken for situations we see near or far, let us be generous in sharing our gifts, donating to causes.

I notice that for all of those awful situations I referred to – Haiti, Sudan, and the devastation of Gaza and Ukraine – UNICEF is working on the ground in all those places. You may notice that UNICEF matches donations to the Gaza appeal, twice over, right now! I will post links on our St. Andrew's Facebook page to allow you to see what kinds of work agencies are doing, to allow us to offer our love to these devastating circumstances.

Beloved ... Be Loved ... Be Love. Amen.