**5 Easter, May 3, 2015, Acts 8:26-40; Ps 22; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8; Rev. Mary Trainor**

I was at someone's house the other day for a book group discussion, and another guest wanted to show a YouTube video. He asked our host what the WEP key was to gain internet access in the house. The host looked shocked said he had no internet connection. There were gasps from others in the room, in disbelief that this household was not connected. The word "connectivity" has become a really important one in our lives; it refers to how well and quickly we are connected to the Internet. Without the Internet nowadays it seems we can't communicate with our friends and family, we can't learn about the latest news, or listen to the latest music, or look things up on Google. Why even students in school have to submit their assignments to their teachers over the Internet! Connectivity is vital.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of connectivity too - connectivity with Him. Jesus said, "***I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing***." In other words, Jesus is telling us: "**Stay connected to me and you will bear fruit. Don't and you won't.**" Wow! This sounds vital, not optional. Yet, there are plenty of people who don't see connectivity with Jesus as important, especially compared to internet connectivity. And, there are plenty of people who don't care about bearing fruit. But, there is only one problem here: bearing fruit is really really important. Jesus wants this for us, and we want this for ourselves too. Good fruit has to do with what we do with our lives, how we interact with others, what we contribute to making the world a better place. Paul, in Galatians 5:22-23 lists nine fruits of the Spirit: "***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control."*** When someone looks at our lives, what do they see? Do they see: anger, impatience, stinginess, greed, frustration, fear, anxiety? These are the opposite of "good fruit." We all are familiar with these, and we don't want them to characterize us -- but how do we make this happen, in this difficult world? Jesus tells us by using the word "***abide:" "abide in me."*** Abiding is a special kind of connectivity; a connectivity that does not cost anything, a connectivity that is not dependent upon technology, a connectivity that is available anywhere at any time -- and it is fast, really fast!

At the retreat center in northern California where I served in January, I was surrounded by vineyards. These old vineyards were full of gnarled old grape vines all in straight rows hooked up to sturdy supports. In winter, you can see the vines clearly -- but in the summer, when the grape leaves are full, you have trouble even seeing the vine itself. I saw rolling hills, acres and acres of those strong vines. Out of the trunk of the vine grow thin branches that bear the leaves and from which the bunches of grapes emerge at the end of the summer. The branches produce fruit only if they are well connected to the vine they emerge from - if that connection is cut off, they don't produce, they don't live. What comes through those branches from the vine?: water, nutrients, hormones, carbohydrates. These are liquids for life that come through the plant's vascular tissues -- the tissues of the vine are the same tissues as those in the branches. This is abiding, connectivity. *Vitis* is the botanical name for grape vines, and this word has the same origin as the word for life: *vita*. We all want vitality, don't we? We get this through the vine, Jesus.

Our connection to Jesus can be like this: so close that it is like Jesus' blood is flowing through our arteries, is pumping through our veins -- pump, pump, flow, pump -- the same blood in Jesus that is in us. Jesus, our true vital life force, pure love, flows through us. Jesus becomes so close that it is like His breathing and our breathing are one and the same. How is this possible? It is possible through relationship building. Jesus **already** abides in us, we are told this in the Gospel: "***Abide in me as I abide in you***." It's like we have a perfect friend, who has already given us amazing sacrificial love and caring (more than we ever thought or imagined we would have), and is waiting for us to respond with certain acts of connectivity: (1) receive the sacrament (*Jesus' real presence*), (2) pray (*dialogue with Jesus, listen, talk, praise, listen, talk, wait, listen, talk, be together*), and (3) read Jesus' words (*in the New Testament*). When we allow Jesus to abide in us, we become attuned to Him - and we experience great joy and peace. It becomes natural for us to want what God wants, and to sense God's will in our daily situations. John, in our Epistle reading today, put it this way: ***"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."*** As we get to know Jesus better, as we abide in Him, as we receive God's love, we give God's love away freely. That same love that flows in us through Jesus can flow through us to others, the community is filled with the merciful energy of God that will bear fruit. The 13th century theologian, Meister Eckhart, wrote that "**a plum tree produces plums not by an act of will but because it is its nature to do so**." When we are connected to Jesus, when we abide in Jesus, as individuals and as a community, it is our nature to show others compassion, loving-kindness, mercy, wisdom, love.

Today, we have a special visitor, Sue Dione from SafeHaven, the domestic abuse shelter here in Shawano. This is a place where Jesus' love abides day after day, for people seeking a safe shelter, for people needing safe care. It is amazing to see what good fruit has come from the work of people like Sue who work at SafeHaven. People have been able to begin new lives. We here at St. John's have had, and do have, the privilege of supporting the important work at SafeHaven. We will hear from Sue at the end of the service.

Yes, connectivity is vital; connectivity to Jesus. It is free. Jesus already abides in you, and as you live your life choosing to abide in Him, you will experience the good fruit that will result -- in your life, and in the lives of others around you who will experience God's love through you. Carry with you the image of Jesus, as the vine you are connected to, the one who is the source of all your life, the one who prepares you to go out and bear fruit in the world, the one who never leaves you or forsakes you, who is with you always, to the end of the age. Amen.