

## **SERMON 934**

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2015

996th Week as Priest

823rd Week at St Dunstan's

88th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

### **I AM THE TRUE VINE**

*Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.*

Our boundaries enclose a pleasant land, said the psalmist. Indeed we have a goodly heritage.

This church, you see, is more than a store front in East Tallassee. It is more than the little white house north of town.

Some of us knew this truth in their hearts from the very beginning, more than twenty years ago. Of if they didn't know it rationally and cognitively, they knew that this church would be more, much more, than it was at its beginning. They believed that it could be more. Their faith and hope swept up an original idea and made it more, much more, than perhaps anyone in the Diocese of Alabama could have ever imagined.

Jesus told us that our life in him would be characterized by such belief, such faith, such hope as this. “I am the true vine,” he said, “and you are the branches.”

If we can imagine ourselves, our life together, our Church of the Epiphany, as a growing, changing, becoming part of the true vine—then we begin to see that it is perfectly natural and altogether quite wonderful that we would grow and change and become something beyond our own expectations, something that is God’s intention for us and Christ’s blessing for us.

Looking in this way at ourselves and our church, it is really no surprise after all. We are surrounded by the joy and wonder of God’s creation on this beautiful spring morning. Our boundaries enclose a pleasant land. It’s a lot to mow and prune and trim and weed-eat and caulk and paint. It’s a lot to care for and “husband” in the old sense. But five acres (or is it more than that?) is an extraordinary blessing. And the beautiful church that sits upon this green world of ours is truly a place of peace—nave, chancel, and sanctuary offering friend and stranger a glimpse of the holy, and the real presence of Christ.

Not that these twenty years have been easy or always smooth. No, I would not say that—although I have only been here not quite two of those years. There have been

times of planting, pruning, and starting over. There has been suffering, and loss, and tragedy—to be sure. And yet, when we stand back and take a broader look at Epiphany Church, we see that God has been our vinegrower, our gardener, our husband—and Christ has been this true vine—and we have been his branches.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit—and I believe that you will see in the weeks and months and years ahead, that we are being blessed by that same Spirit, urged and encouraged by the Spirit, moved and shaped and changed by that same Spirit, and that we are growing, changing, becoming something greater than we could have imagined or even hoped for.

You will hear more about the work of the Holy Spirit as we approach the Day of Pentecost. But for now, let me assure you that we already have everything we need to be the vineyard that God intends us to be. He has already given us the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and I believe that these seven gifts, promised to us in the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, were with us from our beginning—Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Counsel, Strength, Faith, and Holy Fear. They were our foundation from the start, and Christ himself the cornerstone.

Soon we will see that we are living in the Age of the Spirit, and that these Gifts we have received are to be used for the glory and good of the Kingdom of God. Soon we will come to know that our lives, our selves, our souls and bodies, are being changed and shaped, pruned and trimmed, for Kingdom work and Kingdom purposes.

This will be the time we begin to see and to know that our lives—and our common life together in this holy place—are beginning to show forth the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. God’s work in us is already bearing good fruit—which is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control.

You see, God changes us from the inside out. There is always more to us than meets the eye. We are the work of his hands, the apple of his eye, and he is accomplishing his holy purposes through the work of our hands, the prayers of our hearts, and the breath and being of our souls. AMEN.