

May 5th 2021 – Easter V

John 15:1-8

Letting Go

My home region is not only known for mountains, rivers and needle tree forests (which probably wouldn't impress you much), but it is also known for its Black Forest Cherry Cake, beer and wine.

During the radio commercials before the news, the local wineries advertise the quality of the wine. "For millennia, people have tried to capture the sun and use its energy, we have found a way. Our wine is spoiled by the sun, etc. etc."

When my grandfather would take me into the vineyards I was always appalled when I saw the workers in the vineyards cutting back the branches quite radically, and later in the year even cutting away some of the non-ripe grapes.

How can they throw that? It's for the quality, my grandfather would say and explain all about it which usually did not convince me.

Pruning is a painful process. But it is a process for the good. Some things are cut back so that the whole vine can prosper and grow stronger.

Our Gospel passage today resonated with me. When did you last move? I know we have some people in the parish who have just moved or who have relatives who have just moved. Moving is a kind of pruning. The process of moving requires to cut back certain things, it requires to give up certain things and to give away certain things, in order to travel lighter.

What a challenge! There are all these things which we feel emotionally attached to, all this stuff, and then you let it go; you cut the branches back.

I resonated a lot with the American novelist Anne Lamott who once said that everything she has ever let go had scratch marks all over.

It is hard to let go and we want to hold on to things. But then, there is this moment once something is gone and we feel how the burden on our shoulders, the burden on our minds gets lighter. Letting go is painful but it can be a very freeing experience.

Vineyard, moving? That is a big mental leap. But think of other things in your life which you cling to and which might need pruning. There are so many habits, truths, convictions, prejudices, which we hold on to but which the Gospel encourages us to let go, to cut back.

What helps us to abide in Christ, or in another translation, to live in Christ? And what hinders us? What are the moments when we prosper and are fruitful? What are the people, the rituals, the routines that help us to be fruitful and, on the other side, what are the things that pull us away from that and hold us back?

When I went to the vineyard with my grandfather, I felt pain for the vines that were cut back but I would later learn to appreciate the difference in quality of the wine that grew on these pruned vines.

The important learning from our Gospel and the radio commercial from my home region is that “the branch cannot bear fruit by itself” (John 15:4b). For the wine from my region it is the sun, the rain, the earth. So for us, too, the pruning can help us and prepare us but the gift of bearing fruits is granted by God. It is not ours to decide quantity and quality according to our human standards. God knows the fruits we bear, the visible ones and the ones that are invisible for many; sometimes even for ourselves.

May God bless you richly. I am confident that God will continue to bless this community and church and will grant it continuing fruitfulness.

Thank you for having me as a branch among you. I am grateful for having been a part of this community and also that the claw marks for letting me go are not too deep.

Christ says, "Live in me, and I in you" (John 15:4).