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Easter 5B
Peace, Seattle
May 6, 2012
John 15:1-8

A LITTLE PARABLE FROM THE VINEYARD

This morning, a little parable from the vineyard.

There once was a shoot that grew from a Vine, that sprung from the soil of a Vineyard that stretched as far as the eye could see.

This young Sprout was a simple-minded sprout (sprouts and shoots and things don't have much for brains...) A singular notion flowed through his veins day in and day out: **I WANT TO TOUCH THE SKY!**

From the moment the sun first peeked over the rim of the earth, until its last rays disappeared over the horizon, Sprout reached and stretched and extended himself upward, inching ever further toward the deep, blue dome above.

From sunup to sundown, nothing else mattered.
In fact, so focused and determined was Sprout in this goal, that never did he bother to look back toward whence he came; and never did he give a thought to the vine and roots and earth from which he drew his life.

And because he never bothered to see where he had come from, Sprout developed a very limited view of reality. Sprout thought:
UP IS ALL THAT MATTERS. SOME DAY I'LL REACH BIG BLUE!

But one day, all of that changed.

It was a primo day, a perfect day for growing. Rain had fallen during the night, and Sprout had wakened with the sun and was anxious to get growing again.

He had just finished unfurling some new leaves when, for the first time, something out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. Sprout swung his head around; and there, not far away, he saw another shoot, stretching and reaching and extending itself upward, just like him!

Sprout stared at the shoot, dumbfounded.

The other shoot looked really tall, and really straight, and really strong. And Sprout began to wonder if maybe this other shoot wasn't further along on its journey to the sky than Sprout was.

Then the thought hit him: What if it reaches Big Blue before I do!

The whole rest of the day Sprout was preoccupied with that other shoot.
- He no longer felt the sun's warm rays;
- he no longer felt the thrill of energy flowing upward through his veins;
- all he thought was: I'M BEHIND. . . HOW CAN I GET AHEAD?

Sprout's joy had turned to envy. Reaching the sky had turned into a race.
Sprout slept fitfully that night. In his dreams, the other shoot stretching high above him, getting ever further ahead in the race to reach Big Blue.

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The next morning, Sprout woke up late, feeling horrible. He couldn't believe that he'd slept in! OH NO, he thought, NOW THAT OTHER SHOOT'S GOING TO BEAT ME FOR SURE!

Sprout raised his head to look toward where the other shoot had been the day before. But the shoot was no longer there!

Just as he began pondering what might have happened, he felt something grab hold of him, and suddenly, everything went dark.

By the time Spout awoke, it was nearly nightfall. He felt weak, and disoriented; part of him seemed to be missing. Big Blue seemed farther away than ever, and he was surrounded by larger, more mature leaves, leaves he'd never seen before.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME? He murmured.
"You've been pruned," the leaves told him.

PRUNED? The word was new to him.
"Yes, pruned," they answered, "snipped, clipped, nipped, trimmed—cut down."

CUT DOWN?! BUT I WAS GOING TO REACH THE SKY!
"Listen, Sprout…don't worry. It hurts now—we know—we've all gone through it, but in time it'll make you stronger. Besides, there's more to life than trying to reach the sky."

BUT…WHAT MORE COULD THERE BE THAN REACHING THE SKY?
"Making fruit! That's what we're all here for, you know. That's why we exist. To make fruit! Plump, sweet, delicious fruit. That's why we're connected to the Vine."

WHAT VINE—WHERE IS THIS VINE?
"**It's right below you.** In fact, you're part of it. The Vine's deep roots reach into the earth and it is from this earth and through this Vine that everything you need to grow and flourish comes."

"You know that sensation you get when the sun's rays first wake you in the morning, and you feel yourself stirring, and your green leaves glowing?"

YEAH?
"That's the Vine. And you know that feeling you have when the sun is high and hot and you're starting to get thirsty?" YEAH. "And then you feel cool relief course through you like a river?"

YEAH, YEAH!
"That's the Vine. The truth of the matter is, Sprout, none of the things you love, neither the growing nor the stretching, neither the reaching nor the unfurling—none of it could happen without the Vine. The Vine is our source, our life, and everything we are and will become has it's beginning and ending there."

REALLY?
"Mm-hum."
W – O – W !
"You got it: Wow."
I NEVER IMAGINED…SO, WHAT'S NEXT?
"What's next—what's today and tomorrow and ever shall be is simply this: abiding in the Vine."

ABIDING IN THE VINE?

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"Yep."

WHICH MEANS…
"Which means staying right here, growing, reaching, stretching right here, attached to the Vine; because this is where your life is …the life that truly is life.
Oh—and one thing more. Don't be afraid…you can trust the Vine."

TRUST THE VINE….IT SOUNDS PRETTY SIMPLE…BUT I HAVE A FEELING IT'S NOT SO EASY.
"Lots of things that are simple to understand are hard to do. But don't worry, Sprout.
The Vine? It has a grip on you that'll never break—you're not going anywhere!"

I LIKE THAT.
"Me, too."

What a gift we've been given: this organic image from Jesus of what it means to be a child of God when he tells us: ABIDE IN ME:
I AM THE VINE, AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. JUST AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT BY ITSELF UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE, NEITHER CAN YOU UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME.

Christ was not born of this earth—did not become a creature among creatures—to teach us how to flee the world in order to find God, but to teach us how to live fully here and now, within the creation and within the community that the Creator intended for us from the beginning.

This earth, this vineyard, is the domain in which we have been planted. It is from this soil and from this Vine, that our lives unfurl.

THOSE WHO ABIDE IN ME AND I IN THEM, he said, BEAR MUCH FRUIT, BECAUSE APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING.

The gospel is clear: Abundant life is rooted in our connection with Jesus, the Vine.
Our abiding in him manifests itself both in our relationships with each other, and in our relatedness to the rest of God's good creation.

Every time we come to the Table, every time we taste the fruit of the Vine, we are reminded of that connection and that calling and that promise.

So come, sisters and brothers, come to the Table. Come to the Vine. Abide in him. Amen.