

Re-membered in the Resurrection Garden
John 15.1-8, Remembering, staying, re-membering

“Stay with me.... Stay with me as I stay with you.”

“I’m staying with you.... Stay with me.”

This is another compelling image of the relationship between Creator and Risen Christ and human beings. It’s very different from the image of the Shepherd taking us into lush pastures and through deep darkness. But this image of the Vine and branches and staying, it offers us every bit as much assurance. And challenge. And it’s another entry for us into living in the Resurrection Garden.

“Stay with me.”

At face value, this seems like an easy thing, right? How hard can it be to stay somewhere? To stay *with* someone? But as soon as we start asking questions, we know that this invitation to *stay with Jesus* is not what it appears. It may be easy enough to say Yes! to the invitation, but staying...staying is hard. It may be easy in the joy of spring when new life is bursting out everywhere. But spring turns to summer and the sun gets hot and relentless. And the farmer comes along and prunes the branches. That’s when it’s hard to stay. That’s when I want to get up and leave.

“Stay with me as I stay with you.”

The farmer responsible for the vineyard is responsible to make sure that the vines and branches are productive. That they produce the fruit they are intended to produce. No matter how green and lovely the branches might be, the farmer is tending the vines so that they bear fruit. Pruning isn’t punishment. Pruning is simply getting rid of growth that’s distracting. Pruning is cutting away the branches that draw energy away from the production of fruit. Pruning is taking off some branches so that the soil’s energy and the vine’s energy are channeled for juicy clusters of grapes to grow. The branches that have been pruned are

burned. Again, not punishment. But when they are burned, the ash mixes into the soil, fertilizing the soil, providing nutrients for the grapes to grow.

We know this is true. Many of us are gardeners and we've pruned back our plants and vines. We know this is true for plant life. But when it comes to human life...when it comes to my life...invariably I will resist pruning. I'm fine staying with Jesus...until the pruning starts. When pieces and parts of us are threatened, it's hard to stay with Jesus. It's hard to trust that, no matter what, I'm connected to the vine...connected to a deeply rooted Life Source.

One of the problems is that we don't experience life's happenings as pruning. I'm fine with God pruning me. I pray for the Risen Christ to prune me. But I don't get to choose *how* pruning happens. So when life happens, when we feel parts of ourselves being cut back or cut off, we resist. Because frankly, I just don't want to be pruned by someone else. I don't want to be pruned by life's circumstances.

“Stay with me.... Stay with me as I stay with you.”

As a human species, we're being pruned by covid. Are we staying with Jesus, the Vine? As a nation, we're being pruned as our racist and white supremacist systems are being cut away. Are we staying with Jesus, the Resurrected Christ? As a congregation, we're being pruned as the growth of unhealthy patriarchy is being removed. Are we—individually and as a community—staying with Jesus? As Jesus has stayed with us?

Being pruned is hard. When parts of us, as individuals or as a collective, are being cut away we will instinctively want to protest and resist and protect ourselves. But as disciples of Jesus, we've listened to his teachings. And we've watched him. He gave himself to being pruned, again and again from his month in the wilderness to his arrest and execution. And again and again, Jesus stayed with God. Rather than resisting the pruning, he trusted God

the Farmer. He trusted that God's vineyard is within the Resurrection Garden and that even with the most severe pruning, Jesus trusted that the Spirit of God would grow new life. Jesus *stayed with* God. As God stayed with Jesus.

“Stay with me.... Stay with me as I stay with you.”

This sabbatical that we're about to enter into comes at such a good time. The effects of all the pruning this past year are ever so real. For some of us, we're just tired and weary. Others of us are broken and hurting. We don't have the same capacities as we did a year ago. We've been changed by the events in the world around us and by the events here at FoH. This sabbatical gives us—individually and together—time to stop and stay with Jesus. Time to stop and let the power of the Holy Spirit do its work. We've worked hard, had hard conversations; we've learned hard truths about ourselves and our systems. Now it is time to stop and stay with Jesus. Time to stop and let the life-giving power of the Spirit of God breathe in us. Our world and we are broken by our own violence. Now it is time to stop and stay with Jesus. Time to stop and let the healing, resurrecting, re-membering power of God's sabbath do its work within us and in the spaces between us.

And when we aren't sure if we have the capacity for this kind of staying...it's our cue to remember the same Vine that sprouted us to begin with was there long before any of us. When we are being pruned and have been pruned, the Resurrected Christ and will be there, *staying with us*. The Vine is the Source of Life—it's roots a deep and broad and spreading—it will always...*always* raise up new life.

May we enter into our sabbatical, stopping our work so that the Spirit of God can work in us.

May we enter into our sabbatical, prepared to stay with Jesus, the Resurrected One.

May we enter into the Resurrection Garden, each day, trusting the Eternal Farmer to tend to us, and to re-member us.

May it be so.