

June 17th, 2018

Scripture:

John 15:1-25

“Love and hate.”

John the Gospel writer often speaks in opposites --- in contrasts.

In the very beginning of his Gospel --- verse 5 --- John talks of light and then of darkness.

And light and darkness are a recurring theme in John’s writings.

Here today in our reading we have a similar kind of dichotomy --- only this time instead of light and darkness it is love and hate.

The first half of our passage --- verses 1-17 ----- focus on love ---- and the second ---- 18-25 --- hate.

And these words --- love and hate ---- are quite possibly the most diametrically opposed words in human communication.

To love something conjures up all kinds of positive --- peaceful --- welcoming --- life giving --- and beautiful images.

To hate something is quite the opposite ---- hate is hurtful --- negative --- destructive ---- something we generally want nothing to do with.

Other than the odd off the cuff expression ---- I’m not sure I ever really use the word hate.

I might say something like --- “I hate it when that happens.” --- after someone shares with me a story that ends badly --- a story with which I can relate.

“I spilled my coffee getting into the car today.”

“Oh ---- I hate it when that happens.”

Or maybe it's ---- "I hit my funny bone on the doorway on the way in this morning."

"I hate when that happens."

But other than that I'm not sure I use the word --- hate --- very often.

I certainly hope I don't that's for sure --- because in truth there aren't too many things that I can actually say --- "I hate."

And yet this is precisely the word that Jesus chooses in describing how people reacted to Him --- how the world reacted to Him --- and how people will react to us ---- how the world will react to us --- us --- those who love Jesus --- will be treated with hate.

To hate is to have an intense or passionate dislike for someone or something ---- to hate is to detest someone or something --- to hate is to find detestable.

Powerful words --- and even these don't fully capture the power of the word hate.

"I hate you." --- may be the most hurtful words we can ever utter.

"I hate you." ----- just the sound of the phrase is negative and harsh ----- generated from an evil place I think.

"If the world hates you --- keep in mind that it hated me first." ---- Jesus says in verse 18 from John's Gospel today.

"If the world hates you --- keep in mind that it hated me first." --- clearly Jesus knew that His followers would be treated poorly --- despised even.

If we love Him --- if we love God --- if we love Jesus --- we will be hated.

Our love for Jesus will cause others to hate us.

That's what the Bible is telling us today.

If we follow the way of love ---- if we follow God and we follow Jesus --- we will be hated.

How does that make you feel --- what do you think of this?

“They hated me...” --- Jesus says ---- “And they will hate you too.”

“If the world hates you --- keep in mind that it hated me first.” --- Jesus Christ.

Not the most oft quoted phrase of Christ but nonetheless Jesus in His own words ---- “If the world hates you --- keep in mind that it hated me first.”

At first it’s kind of discouraging.

Hate is from the devil --- from the Shatan --- from Satan.

For the most part the devil is content to leave us alone.

But once we love Jesus --- once we openly share --- and claim --- and declare our love for Jesus ---- the devil far from leaves us alone ---- he --- it -- hates us.

There are few things ---- indeed there are no things in this world as detestable as the presence of evil.

And Jesus knows that once we follow Him --- once He chooses us --- these are His words in our passage today ---- “You did not choose me but I chose you.” ---- verse 16 ----- Jesus knows that once we are chosen --- once we follow Him ---- we will need divine help --- divine cultivation.

That’s is why before He even mentions the truth about evil ---- He spends a considerable amount of time talking about how we are connected --- in grafted with Him and under God’s care.

And the image He uses is that of a vine and branches and a gardener.

Jesus is the vine ----- “I am the true vine” ---- He says --- the final of His 7 “I am” sayings ----- we are the branches --- and God is the gardener.

That's a pretty powerful and reassuring image.

Jesus is the trunk --- we are the branches and God is the gardener --- tending us ---- cultivating us --- looking after us.

“I am the vine” --- verse 1 --- you are the branches” ---- verse 5.

“My father is the gardener” --- verse 1 --- you can't make it any clearer than this.

And of course this image of the vine was one that those listening would have been familiar with.

Israel was often referred to as the vine.

Psalm 80 verse 8 reads ---- “You transplanted a vine from Egypt...”

A vine from Egypt --- Israel --- God's chosen people were transplanted from Egypt --- the Exodus --- freedom from slavery under Pharaoh.

It's not surprising that here once again --- we have an image --- a vine --- embedded within another image ----- “Israel as a vine from Egypt” ---- that points to --- reminds us --- brings us back to that seminal movement and journey for the people of God ----- the Exodus.

Do yourself a favour and read over the Exodus story this summer --- I will be reading it again --- at least once over the summer.

Every other passage in scripture is enriched by a knowledge and understanding of the Exodus journey ---- found chiefly in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy ---- but I digress --- intentionally at least though.

So the vine ---- Jesus John 15 ---Psalm 80 ----- Isaiah 5 --- Jeremiah 2 --- and Matthew 20 where Jesus shares the parable of the vineyard and the workers.

This was an image --- the vine --- that the people would have been intimately aware of --- and familiar with.

But Jesus changes it a bit ---- a lot actually --- instead of Israel being the vine --- like Psalm 80 --- like Isaiah like Jeremiah --- Jesus says I am the vine --- and suddenly whoops --- things have changed.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches --- instead of Israel being the vine Jesus is now ---- He's the trunk --- He's the core --- He's the centre suddenly ---- and the people are now the branches.

There's a little more vulnerability in being a branch --- and there is a little more expected of you in being a branch.

And branches can be cut off and branches can be pruned --- as we'll soon hear about.

Being moved from being the vine to the branch --- would have caught people's attention.

All of a sudden they had been displaced a bit.

All of a sudden they had been made considerably more vulnerable --- expendable.

“No branch can bear fruit by itself ---- it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” --- Jesus says --- verse 4.

“I am the vine--- you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you --- you will bear much fruit --- apart from me you can do nothing.”

There are some pretty harsh words here ----- “No branch can bear fruit by itself”

----- and -----

“Apart from me you can do nothing.”

Branches are dependant.

Branches are dependants --- the way children depend on parents --- adults --- -- so branches depend on vines.

We are dependant ----- we are dependants.

“I am the vine --- you are the branches.”

“No branch can bear fruit by itself.”

“Apart from me you can do nothing.” --- you can’t make it any clearer than this ----- we are dependant --- we are dependants.

And dependants need direction ---- and dependants’ needs cultivation.

Just as we have to be attached --- to the vine --- lest we be rendered fruitless ----- so too do we have to be attended to or we will be fruitless.

The pruning that Jesus is talking about here is all about cultivation.

“I am the true vine --- and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit --- while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes --- so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Pruning is cultivating.

We need cultivating.

No vine ---- no bush --- can self prune or self cultivate.

We cannot discern by ourselves what we need to do --- what we need to cut off in order to grow.

We cannot discern by ourselves what we need to do to bear more fruit --- and even if we could discern what needs to be pruned --- we cannot do the pruning ourselves.

The vine needs the gardener ---- the branches need the gardener.

We are dependant --- we are dependants.

And dependency requires humility.

And dependency requires the ability to follow --- be corrected --- be changed --- be cut and pruned.

Pruning can hurt --- and feel bad ---- at least initially.

But when God is the gardener --- when God is the pruner --- it is all ultimately good.

Jean Vanier ---- writing on John 15 --- and pruning --- puts it this way ----

“Accidents ---- sickness --- failures ---- the loss of a job
the death of someone we love --- various unexpected events ----
can hurt and wound life in us
and leave us in a state of grief and desolation.

We feel empty.

Life no longer flows through us;
we have lost our enthusiasm
and sometimes even all desires.

We are wounded in our energies in life.
Like the wounded vine whose branches have been cut off,
we have to wait for new life to flow in us.
We are pruned for something new,
for a life more centered in God and the things of God.

Before the pruning --- we were perhaps too taken up with “things to do,”
maybe even good things --- and had no time for God.
We were like the people in the parable
who were invited to the wedding feast of love ----- (see Luke 14 and
Matthew 22).
But did not accept because they were too busy.

When life is cut and pruned this way,

We may have feelings of emptiness and anguish.

This emptiness can bring forth anger and depression,
But it can also prepare us for something new.

Our emptiness can be a cry to God.
 We must wait patiently --- sometimes in pain and anguish,
 for this new gift of God.

Some pruning comes unexpectedly and violently.
 Some comes gradually, as we grow older
 and are less taken up by things to do
 and the need for success --- reputation ---- and power.

We have more time for God and the things of God,
 And can give more time to the sacred space within us.

All growth in love implies pain and loss ...

The important thing is not to wait until our death
 but to walk with God today,
 to accept loss --- grief --- and all the pruning
 so that we can begin to abide I God.”

Well put ----- and the last part is crucial ----

“All growth in love implies pain and loss ...

The important thing is not to wait until our death
 but to walk with God today,
 to accept loss --- grief --- and all the pruning
 so that we can begin to abide I God.”

Some people wait until they die --- and plan on growing and abiding in God
 mostly then ---- “I’m forgiven ----- I believe ---- I’m too busy now --- I’ll
 grow and abide in God in eternity --- but right now I’m too busy --- to much
 to do.”

We are called to walk with God now --- and allow Him to prune us now ---
 so that we can truly abide in God now.

But it’s painful.

It’s painful at least in the short term ----- it’s painful to allow God --- to
 invite God ---- to trust God to prune you now.

And it will also cause people --- the world to hate you.

If we love Jesus ---- if we abide in God --- if we allow --- invite God --- to prune us --- to cut us up a bit ----- it will hurt and the world will think less of us --- hate us even --- that's what Jesus is saying here.

Jesus is not soft soaping His disciples His followers ----- His final "I am" saying is about love --- hurt --- hatred --- and abiding.

Love --- hurt --- hatred --- and abiding.

John chapters 13 to 17 ----- are what are referred to as Jesus' farewell discourses.

Jesus' farewell discourses.

Often what we say just before we leave ----- often what we say as we're wrapping things up ---- are the most important part.

These are some of the most important words Jesus has for His followers.

Following me --- abiding in me will hurt sometimes --- in the short term it will hurt.

Following me --- remember how the world hated me ---- following me will cause people to hate you too.

But don't panic --- abide --- remain in me --- remain connected to me in love even when you're hated --- even when it hurts --- abide --- remain in and with me.

Jesus is being frank with His followers about what is ahead for them as people of the way --- as His disciples.

And much of it will be hard --- at least initially.

Pruning ---- pain --- hatred --- grief --- loss.

But then there is also beauty --- and goodness --- and joy.

Verses 9 to 11 ---

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Love ----- joy ---- peace --- and back to love again.

Verse 17 ---- “This is my command: Love each other.”

There will be grief ---

---- there will be loss ---

-- you ----- we will be cut apart --- pruned

--- but if you --- if we abide ---- in me ---- in God

----- our joy will be complete

--- so love --- love even when it costs --- even when it hurts

--- love such that you are willing to change and be changed

--- abide --- don’t give up --- don’t break away --- hang in there

--- hang in there because of me ---- hang in there because I have chosen you

---- hang in there because I am with you and in you

--- hang in there because God’s got this

--- hang in there because God is fashioning --- pruning you.”

That’s what Jesus is saying.

At least in the first half of our passage.

In the second He’s sharing with us the reality of how we will be treated in this world when we do this ----- abide in Him.

And the reality is we will be despised.

But our reception isn’t what matters --- abiding in Christ is what matters.

When we have the life of Jesus --- the will of God flowing through us --- it doesn’t mater what the world thinks of us --- whether they love us or whether they hate us.

What matters is remaining connected to God in Christ.

Jesus is a realist.

The Gospel isn't all sunshine and butterflies.

There is pruning too.

There is short term grief ---- pain --- derision --- dismissal and so on.

But abide.

Stay with.

Hang in there.

Be committed.

Don't give up.

Remain connected --- in grafted ---- to and with and for Christ.

In this life there is love and there is hate and there is everything in between -
-- if we remain --- if we abide in Him --- it is love that wins.

In this life there is love and there is hate and there is everything in between -
-- if we remain --- if we abide in Him --- eternal love is where we end up ---
God's presence.

There will be pain --- there will be pruning --- there will be hatred --- you ---
we will be hated --- when we abide in Christ we will be hated.

“If the world hates you --- keep in mind that it hated me first.” --- He says.

But --- if we abide in Him ----- love wins.

There is love and there is hate --- and there is everything in between ---- in
this life --- in this world.

For those of us who abide in Him --- love prevails ---- love wins.

That's the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today.

The home of our hearts needs to be emptied --- cleaned up --- and pruned ---
so that we can be filled with God --- and abide in His love.

When we abide in Him ---- He abides in us.

In closing --- the words of Christ ----

“Now remain in my love.

This is my command ---- love each other.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be
complete.”

Amen.