

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B (April 28, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Bear Fruit

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to you when you hear the word “fruitful”?

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 15:1-8](#)

- Who is “the true vine” and “vinegrower”? [Jesus is the true vine, and God is the vinegrower. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower” (John 15:1).
- What happens to branches that do not bear fruit? [“He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit...” (John 15:2a).]
- “Abide in me as I abide in you,” verse 4a, is translated in different ways. “Abide” was defined as “remain” (Common English Bible), “dwell” (AMPC Amplified Bible, Classic Edition), and “stay joined to me” (Contemporary English Version).
 - Which translation of the word do you prefer and why?
- The Preaching Notes for April 28 say, “There is also a warning – watch out for pruning. Not because of being cut off so much as being left out. We always read this as judgment, and it is. But the real power of the image is that what is pruned misses the vitality of connection; you miss the verdant life offered; you miss out on the sustenance and strengthening and the glory of growth and life and joy. And you miss the opportunity to produce fruit.”
 - What does it mean to you that we need to “watch out for pruning”?
- Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5a). How might you be more fruitful in your life and your church as his branch? Are there things you can do this week to abide more in Jesus?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, we come before You as branches seeking nourishment from Jesus, our true Vine. Help us to abide in Him, so that we may bear abundant fruit that glorifies Your name. May our lives reflect Your love and grace to all around us. Amen.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B (May 5, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Love One Another

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to mind when you hear the word “love”?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 15:9-17](#).

- What is Jesus’ commandment in the passage today? [“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:2).]
- Today’s Preaching Notes say, *“Joy is a shared experience, rather than a solitary one. That might help us understand when Jesus said, ‘That my joy may be in you and your joy might be full.’ He is saying that our joy, the human experience, that fleeting but powerful passion that fills us up and threatens to burn us out, is not complete until it is joined to his joy, the holy, divine joy that knows that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. Our joy is complete – or mature, or perfect; it is all the same word in Greek - only when woven into his joy.”*
 - What do you think it would be like to live life with “Jesus’ joy in you”?
- Jesus said, “I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends” (John 15:15). Reflect on the transition from servants to friends. What does it mean to be called a friend of Jesus? How does this change your relationship with Him and with other people?
- “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16a). What does it mean to you that Jesus chose you? How does knowing that you have been chosen by Jesus to bear fruit affect your understanding of your purpose and actions in the world?
- “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another” (John 15:17).
 - What does loving one another look like in your context? What could you do this week to work on loving one another within your families, church, workplace, or community?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, as we conclude our time together, we thank You for Your word to love one another as You have loved us. Empower us to carry this command into our daily lives, showing Your love in all we do and say. Amen.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B (May 12, 2024) – How Shall We Love: We Share Christ

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “What images come to mind when you hear the word “unity”?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [John 17:6-19](#)

- Today’s Preaching Notes reflect on unity: *“Jesus prays that we (that’s you and me and everyone else) would be one as “we are one.” We are to be as close as Jesus and God; we are called to function as parts of the Trinity, aspects of the same thing, different, but one in essence and in hope. That is what community really means. It doesn’t mean individuality is lost; differences make the whole what it is. But it does mean that we acknowledge our need for the other, acknowledge that we are somehow incomplete without the other. How can we fight among ourselves? How can we hate and cast stones at one another when we are part of the same whole? We are hating and casting stones at ourselves. The church is many things, but in this prayer, it is clear that the church is called to be one, to be united.”*
 - How might you foster unity within your own community despite differences in opinions or backgrounds?
 - How might you cultivate a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation when conflicts arise within your community?
- “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (John 17:14). Jesus emphasizes the distinction between His disciples and the world.
 - How can you maintain your identity as a follower of Christ while engaging with the world around you?
 - When have you faced challenges in maintaining your Christian identity while engaging with the world? How did you navigate through it?
- *“Our argument in this series and especially this week is that our calling is to live a life of love, and our fundamental belief is that sharing Christ is the loving thing to do. However, the methodology for sharing is as important as the sharing itself. Loving is an act of respect; it is a way of honoring others, the objects of our love—especially those whom society has neglected, overlooked, or ignored”* (5/12 Preaching Note). “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).
 - This week, how might you be sent to the world to share Christ? How does Jesus' mission to the world inspire you to live out your own mission as a disciple of Christ?
 - How does it challenge your comfort zones and call you to step out in faith?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, we thank You for calling us to be One. Guide us as we go forth, so that we may live in unity and bear witness to Your grace in our every word and deed. Empower us to fulfill this mission with courage and joy. Amen.

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