

Sermon
May 2, 2021
Fifth Sunday of Easter

The blooming trees are glorious! I love seeing them in full bloom and in some places where there is a variety of trees of all shapes and sizes in flower there is a beautiful palate of colours. We here are so fortunate to be able to experience this gift of spring.

Some of you who are avid gardeners are probably really excited about what is happening in your garden now. You're coddling new plants and excitedly watching the perennials burst through the earth. You're digging around in the soil, perhaps visiting the garden centres – doing what gardeners do.

Before we lived here Dave and I had occasion to come from the northern BC or from Manitoba to visit friends and family on the West Coast. We were always so amazed and overwhelmed by the abundance of growth, green and colour that was here, especially if we came during the winter or spring months. When we moved to the Sunshine Coast and had our own house we could hardly believe how quickly everything grew and needed attention, cutting, trimming, pruning, and harvesting!

It is so life affirming to see, smell and feel the growth that bursts forth in spring. It is a time of resurrection!

Again, today in the gospel reading from John we are presented with another allegory to help us to understand God's incarnate relationship with us, that of the vine and the branches. Last week it was sheep and the shepherd. John's Gospel, as we are well aware, is rich in symbolism and "subtle shades of meaning" (HarperCollins Study Bible). I can't say that I'm any more familiar with vineyards and vines than Pastor Hergy is with shepherds and sheep, yet the stories are meaningful to us, we receive comfort from them as well as are challenged to glimpse at yet

another way in which we can understand, experience, and participate in God's incarnational presence within and among us through Jesus and our natural world.

The first century Palestinians, Jesus among them, would have known as much about vineyards and vines as, shepherds and sheep. They are entities commonplace to life in that time and geography. Using those allegories Jesus could provide for his disciples multiple ways to tell the story of his place among God's people. Like solving a problem, sometimes hearing a number of different approaches to the solutions will provide the "ah, ha" of understanding or at least being closer to understanding. That really is the magic of stories.

If you have been a vintner or maybe lived in the Okanagon or other wine country you will understand this imagery better. But for us here on the Sunshine Coast today we can look at the myriad of blooming trees and appreciate the time and care needed for those trees to grow strong. They extend branches that define their unique sizes and shapes; experience pruning, trimming and attention to thrive. In time the whole tree bursts into flower in the spring and ultimately may bear fruit for us to enjoy in the weeks and months ahead. We can extrapolate our trees to the image of the vine and the branches in the gospel of John. One commentator says, What is true of growing grapes is true of the relationship between the Father, Son, and believing community. The allegory proceeds in a straightforward way. Jesus is the vine, the Father the vinedresser, and the community the branches. The vinedresser lops off any branch that does not produce and prunes any branch that does. It is the healthy branches that will produce fruit, all the while firmly abiding with the vine.

God's love abides, it remains, nurturing and caring for the vine, and we abide or remain in the vine—a vine much bigger and more interconnected and interdependent than we probably know. The vine's job isn't to prune; it's to abide. The result of abiding—taking part in the mutuality of the vine and receiving the care and love of the vinegrower—is bearing fruit. The fruit we bear connects us even further—in mutual love, celebration, and interdependence.

Anne Edison-Albright

Just as the branch is a part of the vine and cannot live apart from vine, so we abide or dwell in Jesus, the true vine or real vine. This is not individual piety but community. *We* are the branches, not “*I* am the branch.” And the point of the abiding is to bear fruit. B.B. Scott

Today I am going to tell you the story of Barnaby Frost. It’s another approach to the allegory of the vine and the branches. It’s a children’s story that like all good stories fires up the imagination and gives us a new perspective in our own time and place. It can also be an experience of delight that leaves the reader or listener changed or even energized and empowered – somehow moved.

So, please, enjoy this story. The illustrations go from black and white to abundantly rich in colour – use your imagination!

Barnaby Frost

By Laurel Lee

Barnaby Frost

packed his bicycle.

He put his books on the front and

his lunch on the back.

He thought to himself it must be equal and even.

He balanced the number of books

With the weight of the thermos and pedaled out to the main highway.

A truck built like a locomotive raced by at full speed.

The traffic pressed forward like beads on a string. The

cars considered only themselves

in their race for place and position.

There was little room for Barnaby.

Barnaby inhaled the exhaust
and exhaled a sigh. The motors were
all he could hear. The fumes
were all he could smell. The traffic was all he could see.
He shook his head; what he had hoped would be a pleasure was a project.

A little finger of a road
veered from the side of the
main highway. It pointed in a new
direction. Barnaby turned off the main highway.

In the middle of the road was a green leaf. It
quivered and shivered as it pushed through the earth. The stem doubled
itself in a ripple of leaves and grew.

Barnaby watched the leaves of the vine. They caught his tires
In a green-growing line.

The vine wrapped around the bicycle and the rider.
It wound around his leg, curled over his arm
and encircled his hat. The branch was very green
and Barnaby was very white.

The bicycle raced down the stem. Barnaby
gripped his handlebars and gasped. He
was hurtling to the root of the matter.

Barnaby wondered at what he had lost,
and wondered at what he had found.
He was surrounded with colours he had never seen
and music he had never heard.

It was quiet at the bottom of things. Barnaby turned his bicycle
on its side and rested from his ride. The bicycle was still
at the root of the vine.

The animals came to Barnaby Frost. They flew
down from the sky, they climbed out from the
trees and from under the blossoms.

One beast called himself a Gafoon. He
had a smile the size of a bicycle handlebar.
He plucked a bloom from the vine and
gave it to Barnaby.

Barnaby lifted the flower in his hand and danced.

The Gafoon took a turn. He wore Barnaby's hat
and Barnaby's tie.

It was time to go home. Every creature
wrapped cuttings of flowers and leaves
around Barnaby and the bicycle. They wound
the plant around his hat and called him
a branch of the vine.

Barnaby gripped his handlebars and pushed
hard on his pedals to climb the hill to the top.

He came through the earth like a garden on wheels.

Barnaby rode to the main highway, pulling a
flower spangled banner. It was the
glory and the power of the vine.

A truck built like a locomotive
slowed down to half the speed in
half the time.

The flowers were all the truck driver
could see. He inhaled the scent and exhaled
a sigh.

The traffic pressed forward like beads on a string.

The cars no longer considered only themselves, in their
race for position and place.

Barnaby Frost trailed the vine.

He rode his bike at the head of the line.

Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and
I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Amen