

Text: [John 15:1-12 \(CEB\)](#)
Date: October 6, 2024 – World Communion Sunday
Title: “As I Have Loved You”
Theme: When there’s a breach in a human relationship, it should drive us back to the true vine.

1

“Love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus says.
Easy to say, nearly impossible to do.

It definitely feels impossible in an election season
We sometimes have a hard time even remembering one
another’s humanity
Much less being able to reach beyond ourselves in ways that look
at all loving

And even in the Church, how do we talk about loving one another
when we in the UMC have just experienced the first major
schism since the 1840s split over slavery?
There’s now a WHOLE SEPARATE Methodist denomination – the
Global Methodist Church –
formed in opposition to the UMC’s decision to remove anti-
LGBTQ+ language from the *Discipline*

One of the things that trips us up when we think about loving like
Jesus loved is that,
In a time of heated disagreement, loving feels a lot like
“condoning”

For example, consider this:
Does being friends with someone who disagrees with you
politically mean you’re selling out friends on your side?
Particularly when you believe the rhetoric a candidate uses or the
policies they support would do harm to people you care
about?

How do we reconcile those things?
Because I believe part of loving people is being willing to stand up
for them

2

So, in 2024, is it possible to love and not agree?
Or do we have to agree in order to love?

I'm a little afraid if love requires agreement
Because none of us agree on everything
Where do we draw the lines?

We could seek a way out
A biblical argument could be made that Jesus' command to "love
one another as I have loved you" applies only within the
church
I mean, Jesus was speaking to the disciples when he said this

To me, that's not a convincing or satisfying argument
It feels like looking for a loophole, which never seems to point us
in the direction of righteousness or godliness
It also doesn't solve, for example, the problem around our recent
split
Because *aren't we all Christians?*

3

I think love has got to be rooted in something more fundamental
And that's the deep belief that ALL people, everywhere, are
worthy of God's loving care
That Jesus died for all, and not just some
Your best friend, as well as your bitter enemy
God's love is big enough to include all the people we hate
And all those who hate us
To quote another line from John's gospel:
"This saying is harsh. Who can hear it?" (John 6:60)

Why is loving like Jesus loved so difficult?

The short answer is: we're human, and not God

People can hurt us

Loving feels like condoning because we're afraid of the damage
someone can do to us, or to people we love

I don't have an easy solution for that

I do believe some people are easier for us to love from a distance

And sometimes that's the right way – in fact, the only way

To come back to today's scripture, what we find is that sometimes
in our relationships, a little pruning is needed

4

So, there are two primary reasons you prune a grapevine, did you
know that?

The first is to maximize both the quantity and quality of fruit

Jesus spoke the truth: you have to cut back all the canes that
bore fruit last season to make the vine even more fruitful

If you want the right amount of fruit –

That is, right-sized grapes in right-sized clusters that are going to
taste good, you've got to prune

Otherwise you end up with puny, pruny grapes

Second reason you prune is to increase disease resistance

Less extraneous plant material means more sunlight and better
air circulation

This is how you prevent rot and mold and disease

Now, I see a couple parallels to things we may be feeling in
relationships during this time

We may feel like some of our relationships aren't as fruitful as we
want them to be –

that they're kind of superficial because we have to hide parts of
ourselves in order to keep the peace

And maybe we're even worried that the lack of air & sunlight is causing the relationship to be eaten away from the inside
What I do know is that a relationship where respect and care only seem to go one way is not easy to maintain

There can't be closeness without mutuality
Without space for light and air, and for people to be exactly who they are
So sometimes pruning – painful as it can be – is precisely the thing that's needed

5

But that's not to say that even if we make that decision, we don't still have work to do
"A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me."

Even when we make the decision to prune certain relationships, there is always one that's non-negotiable
And that's our relationship to Jesus

Because any time there's a break in a human relationship
It should be a sign to us that we need to invest even more intentionally in our relationship with God

To do some self-reflection
To do some praying
To ask whether there's anything WE did that we need to make amends for
And even if we keep coming to the conclusion that pruning a particular relationship was the right thing to do
We need to keep praying for the day when things might be different

Now, there may be some extreme examples where those kinds of
prayers are not possible
And if you've got questions about those, that's something worth
talking about

But I think my statement is mostly right
Pruning should send us back to the true vine
When a relationship gets broken, our prayers are for the day
when it can be set right again
Because we don't ever want to lose sight of that person's
humanity
Or God's love for them

That's how we become like the branch that's thrown out and dries
up
That's when our faith is no good for anything anymore
Is the day when we begin believing there are people who are
unworthy of God's love

6
Love one another as I have loved you
Easy to say, nearly impossible to do – even in the best of
circumstances

But most definitely impossible to do if we fail to remain in the vine
Because it's like Jesus says,
Without him, we can't do anything

So, if this is a season of pruning for you
Let that drive you back to the true vine once more

Amen.

by Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ