

A New Song of Resurrection
5th Sunday after Easter, May 2, 2021 Trinity UMC

Intro to the Reading John 15:1 – 8

After the Last Supper and before he is arrested, Jesus in the Gospel of John continues teaching his disciples...preparing them for what is to come. Let's hear these old and familiar words, looking for a way to sing them in a new melody for our time and place. I'm using the Contemporary English Version so this may not sound exactly as you remember it...

Jesus Is the True Vine CEV

15 Jesus said to his disciples:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of what I have said to you.

⁴ Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. ⁵ I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. ⁶ If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire.

⁷ Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you.

Sermon: 'Make a Joyful Noise'

When I was learning early on...how to prepare a sermon. I was told to study the Scripture and look for the words that are repeated over and over again. The writing style for much of the Bible makes a point of emphasizing what's important by repetition. When you read the same word or group of words over and over again, you may well be onto something important.

I am using the Contemporary Version of the Bible because it is easy to hear in this morning's reading, the one phrase over and over again...'stay joined to me.' **(Go back and re-read the phrases.)**

In other translations, the words 'Abide in Me' are used but how many of you use the word 'Abide' in your day to day conversations? Or hear it used very often in movies or news reports? "Stay Joined to me" is just a lot more common and in those words, we hear Jesus giving his disciples, and us, over and over again, an invitation to stay connected to Jesus. To be bonded with him. To be grafted, if you will onto the strength and the power of his life and teachings and his death and resurrection.

Staying joined to Jesus is a powerful message for us in this era of history when there are so many forces that would tear us apart, rather than encouraging us to be joined together. We who follow Jesus, have an advantage in that our Holy Writings and our understanding tells us that there is value in unity. One of the larger lessons in the Bible

is that conflict is yes, inevitable in this world. Conflict in the church. Conflict in society. Conflict in the marketplace. The lesson of the Bible, however, is that we have Jesus. And Jesus is inviting us to always remember that staying joined to him can be a life-style, even in the midst of division and partisanship.

We are motivated to unity when Jesus tells us that he is the vine that can connect all of us...to each other and to him. We hear Jesus and believe him when he tells us that God is the gardener who will decide which branches need to be trimmed and gathered up and thrown into the fire. It's not for us to make that judgment. That's God's job. I remember saying many times in my ministry...It's God's job to judge—which God does with mercy and a great care for justice. It's our job to love—to love God, our neighbors, even our enemies—in spite of what may be going on around us.

And that's hard to do. But new songs help because in times of intense conflict, the old songs, the things we were taught to say in the past can seem stale and anemic. Over-used and trite even. Christmas carols would lose their power and meaning if we sang them all year round so someone, Mr. J. M. C. Crum to be exact, in 1928 wrote 'Now the green blade rises from the buried grain took the melody of that song and put Easter words to it...*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain Jesus' touch can call us back to life again, fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been: Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*

At this point in the Easter season you might be thinking...I'm not a singer. I don't write songs. Why do we keep hearing this 'Sing a new song' message over and over. I have a couple of examples for you about how this can apply to our time and place.

For example:

Caitlen Jenner—announced this week that she is running for California Governor as the current governor is being challenged by 1.6 million valid signatures, calling for a recall and his removal from office. <https://news.yahoo.com/gavin-newsom-californias-governor-faces-232617596.html> So there must be some kind of political scandal going on AND a transgender woman who was born a man is going to step into that state's politics.

Old song in this Upper Midwestern part of the country may go something like this...A roll of the eyes, a shrug and what else can you expect from California? There all a little bit wacky out there...no offense to anyone who comes from California. I think that ever since the 60's hippy days, peace love and flower power, has been labelled by us Midwesterners as kind of kookie place. Not in a negative way necessarily. More in an entertaining kind of way. It's kind of fun to talk about the weird stuff that happens in California, just to affirm that we're glad it's not happening here.

Unfortunately, however, that attitude, that song we sing about weird California, reinforces the differences between them and us? They're wacky. We're common sense. They're flighty. We're solid.

That attitude puts us up on a pedestal a little bit.

The problem being...we have our own weirdness in politics, don't we? As far as I know, we don't have a recall campaign going on yet.

But can you see that shaking our heads over California politics obscures the reality that our governor was threatened with being kidnapped and possibly murdered? That's pretty heavy stuff.

A new song for us to sing would be to say out loud and up-front...Wow, they've got troubles out there but at least they're using the legal procedures of signatures instead of the criminal overthrow of an elected official?

Singing the California's whacky song also gives us a way to hide behind any distaste or disturbance that the transgender issue may raise for us. And let's be honest. For many of us, it's a difficult subject. I admit that I was not able to stay friends with a woman who became a man back in the 1990s when I still lived in Iowa. It was just too hard for me to watch someone go through the physical procedures required. So I stepped back from the relationship.

A new song I would sing today, if I had to do it over with would be to consider the story in the Bible. In Acts Chapter 8...after Jesus' resurrection. After the Pentecost Holy Spirit experience in Jerusalem, a disciple of Jesus named Phillip ran into an Ethiopian Eunuch. Eunuchs, as you may know, are surgically modified men, castrated with the intention that they would be safe around women. This particular Ethiopian eunuch was the head of the treasury for the Queen of Ethiopia. High placed and trusted but stripped of his biological manhood.

He was a God-follower without being a Jew and came to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. On his way home, he was studying the book of Isaiah in his chariot and the disciple Phillip was led by the Holy Spirit to guide the eunuch in his understanding of the prophet Isaiah and the good news of Jesus. One thing led to another...the Holy spirit worked a miracle of transformation and the eunuch, with his surgically altered body, asked to be baptized and Phillip went down into the water with him and claimed the eunuch for Jesus.

Does God find eunuchs or transgender people unacceptable? Not according to this Acts 8 story. When Jesus says 'I am the vine...stay joined to me' he is also asking us to stay joined to a whole bunch of people who may be living very different lives from ours. And learning to accept those differences just might call for a new song even as we are giving thanks for the steadfast love and grace that Jesus offers to ALL, meaning ALL who seek him. I keep coming back to verses from last week's Scripture where Jesus talks about being the Good Shepherd: I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.

I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd...

Changes in people, in politics, in the economy, in the world all call for new songs. A new song is being written right now as our Methodist denomination is being challenged with division and disconnection.

In the last six months, a new Methodist denomination has been formed and launched. . It's called the Liberation Methodist Connection. Their web-site is thelmx.org It's pretty simple at this point. They define themselves as:

We are a grassroots denomination of former, current, and non-Methodist faith leaders working on the unfolding of the kin-dom of God. We intentionally invite the full participation of all who are living out their God-given identities and expressions, including but not limited to:

