

John 15: 1-8  
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### *What Kind of Grapes?*

Growing grapes was no great secret in Jesus' day. Wine was the common drink and vines were grown all over the land, part of the Fertile Crescent. We think of ancient Israel as desert wasteland often. And there was much land like that. But this was also a land that survived and thrived on the bounty of its harvest.

Not unlike the Willamette Valley. In similar ways, we know an equally thriving and abundant horticultural life. And when it comes to growing grapes. Well, a simple drive to somewhere as close as McMinnville will tell you that the wine industry is alive and well in Oregon.

Probably most of us have had opportunity at one point or another to appreciate the fruits of our local vineyards - whether through a little country jaunt or a trip down the road to TJs. Either way, even those of us who don't drink can acknowledge that there is great variety in the kinds of wines produced for us these days.

I'm quite sure that Jesus' friends and companions did not have the refined palates we have acquired to appreciate the subtle but significant differences between the Syrah and the Cabernet and the Pinot Noir and the Sauvignon and the Merlot and the Chardonnay and the Riesling and the Zinfandel. And, well you get the idea.

And of course, this list of wines is paired with an equally long list of grapes - some the same in name, but also there's the Malbec, the Barbera and the Sangiovese.

All of this is to say that to be a vintner today is to have a highly developed sense of taste and an appreciation for subtle differences.

Isn't creation just amazing? We could be strapped with just one flavor grape, or one type of tree or flower or cat or dog. But no, we are blessed - even some might say, overwhelmed - with the abundance of variety.

All growing out of the same essence, the same elements of carbon and hydrogen and oxygen. Of course, as in the case of grapes, it is clear that subtle differences in levels of hydrogen and oxygen - as in the form of water - create more and less hospitable climates. Despite this, it all still goes back to the fact that this radiant, wild, and diverse abundance burst from the same basic elements.

"I am the vine," Jesus says. "God is the vineyard keeper."

That's one way to understand these basic elements of life. Jesus as the vine and God as the tender of all that grows. So that when we follow any vine - any expression of life - back to its origins we get to this source of love, in which we can abide, thrive, bear fruit.

Play with this metaphor a little bit. As you follow the strands of your own life, as you consider your walk of faith, where is it that you see the fruits of your efforts: where have you been most

rooted in the source of life such that your life bears witness to that love? And what types of grape have been your harvest?

Where in your vocation? How is it you have born fruit in teaching or building or healing? Be specific.

Where in your home life? How is it you have born fruit in your family of origin or the one you have built in your adult life? What fruit have you born through parenting or committed relationships? Where in your civic life? How has your neighborhood? Your city? seen the fruits of your faithfulness? How have your friendships born fruit from your rootedness in the source of life - the vine of all vines?

We gather around this table every month and enjoy the fruit of the vine and the seed of the stalk. We share the cup and the loaf. And in doing so we recognize how we are all linked in life by the One who Sustains all of life.

So in the same way that our personal lives know the benefits of faithful endeavors, so too our corporate life here at Lincoln Street Church is expression of the fruit of the vine. What grapes have been grown here?

So I want you now to take seriously how it is that you are rooted in the the Source - the vine of all vines? Where do you see the grapes of your life growing in all of their wonderful, wild diversity?

As we gather around this table today and give thanks for the blessing of being grounded in this practice and grounded in these specific fruits of the earth - the grape and the cup, as we gather here today, let us be mindful of how it is that God - the vineyard tender - is alive in our lives, helping us bear witness to the bounty of love. Helping us to more fully express with our whole lives how it is we strive to bear the fruits of love, compassion, mercy, justice, forgiveness. And encouraging each of us into expression that is uniquely and subtly our own.

What are your grapes? Friends, let us not hide those fruits at the bottom of the bushel. But give thanks with glad and generous hearts for the ways in which we experience our faith bringing fruit to a world in need.

I invite you to write a personal fruit of the vine on one grape and a corporate church fruit on the other. When we gather in prayer around the table, we will have opportunity to bear witness to how it is we give thanks for the vine of life - winding its way, abundantly, creatively, wildly, and in subtle and great diversity through our lives.

The fruit of the vine to transform the world in love.

Amen.