

Everything keeps changing. And it's hard.

People talk of the "Before Times" now, before COVID, and even beyond Covid so much has drastically changed in our society and world! Technology for example is changing everything, and technology itself keeps changing. Some of you may relate to this, I get notices on my computer saying an update is available now, would you like to install it?

No! I don't. I know how to do things on this version, I don't have a time to learn a new way, which frankly does not always seem better.

We ourselves keep changing. Our bodies age, we get sick, loved ones pass away. Our inner beliefs and sense of connection with God changes - and we may not want to have our sense of God and our faith changing or evolving - why can't it just stay the same?

You teens and youth who are here know the challenges of change - simpler times of childhood giving way to more complex understandings and feelings, a deeper awareness of the world's troubles, your relationship with your parents is changing while you enter new social territory with your friends, maybe social awkwardness, and the whole chemistry of your body is changing in this magnificent metamorphoses from child into young adult, which doesn't always feel magnificent.

And you may wonder who you are, and what is there to hold on to when the whole ground is shifting?

Though you may not always feel this, we adults have faith and respect for you for all that you can become, and also great empathy for your challenges! With all our small personal changes and large global changes, we too are often wondering what there is to hold on to when the whole ground is shifting.

The topic of change might be relevant here at Saint Paul's these days, maybe? With the entire clergy staff turning over in about a year. All for really positive reasons, following the call of God to be closer to family or work in a new ministry - but still, there's grief and a sense of loss and discomfort.

And there's that feeling that everything's changing and it's hard.

There's just a part of us that *doesn't feel comfortable* with change. And for that part of us, unfortunately the bad news is that one thing we can count on to NOT change is the fact of change itself being in our lives.

Change is part of the reality and design of God's creation. Look at nature!

But the good news is, we've been fashioned to live and thrive in that reality. To come to know what is *unchanging* and live into it, finding the beautiful truth of God that runs through us like a river, and is eternal, and is who we are, in essence.

In today's gospel Jesus uses a powerful metaphor to convey this good news about what changes, and what is eternal and unchanging, and who we are in that.

Jesus said: I am the vine, and you are the branches.

Like any saying of Jesus there are many ways to understand this, but here's one way.

Our source of life is like a vine. God, the underlying source, sends through us a mysterious and powerful energy that miraculously animates us, gives us life.

Through the branches of the vine runs sap, which is made of earth and sunlight, warmth and water and air. And in a process we don't understand and can't perform ourselves, these elements become stems and leaves and flowers and fruit and seeds that create new life. In this way the vine is continually changing form, just like our lives.

But the sap is not only composed of the elements, but of an ineffable formless grace, an energy, a vibration - in a very real sense, love. Divine love.

We can see the love in the forms of the everchanging vines, but the essence of it does not change.

We too are composed of and unfold from this creative energy, this flowing love, wisdom, and energy of God in us. Granting us tremendous gifts that can bear fruit – gifts like conscious awareness, imagination and thought, the capacity to sense God's presence, and to give and receive love infinitely.

Our bodies and things around us constantly change, but this essence does not.

And the remarkable adaptability that we have to live in the sea of change is this: We can come to *know* and *feel* this essence of God, this presence of God within us – the wisdom, peace, love, energy of life.

We not only have the capacity to sense it and engage with it, we have the freedom to choose to do so - or not.

We have the freedom to choose to engage with it and know it as *who we are*. This freedom to choose is in the core of who God has made us to be.

Instead of clinging to the hope that things will not change, believing our security is there, we can become aware of what is eternal in us, swim in it, and convey it to others through love.

Rather than being shackled to the torturous bonds of anxiety caused by things that change, we can focus on being what God has given us to be.

Years ago, I met a fisherman, and even though the conversation I had with him lasted only about 20 seconds, his words had a profound and lasting effect on me.

I was leading a retreat on a mostly silent walk through a deep forest on a path next to a river. And at one point I had a strong feeling we should stop and pray. As we circled round, a fisherman appeared at the bend of the path. He paused to wait so as not to disturb us but I told him he could come through. And wanting him to feel at ease as he passed through the middle of our circle, I asked “What are you fishing for?”

He immediately smiled, his dark eyes shining, and I could feel his love and respect for the fish.

“Small mouth bass, you can see them out there because they glint like silver in the sunlight. They’re very strong because they love to swim in the center of the current.”

That’s all he said, and then he was gone.

But that was it! That was the exact prayer that we needed to hear.

It was a gift that richly informed the rest of the retreat.

We too can swim in the center of the current, in the deeper swiftly moving currents, unfazed by its rapidly ever-changing shapes and forms and ripples.

We are not fashioned to have to be constricted to stagnant still waters in order to be safe and happy.

We have been given the freedom and incredible gifts to swim in and know the eternal, the life force of God flowing through us.

We are free to develop the musculature of our heart and soul and vision needed to swim powerfully in the center of the current, glinting and sparkling like silver in the light of Christ. And in so doing we convey that light and the love, the holy love, to others who are suffering and needing it.

With all God's heart, God wants us to know this freedom and power in the center of the current, and to experience and share the fullness of life, the peace, the love, the joy.

May it be so.

Patricia Rose

4/28/24

5th Sunday of Easter, Year B