

**MAY 2<sup>ND</sup> WORSHIP SERVICE with HOLY COMMUNION**

Those worshipping from home,  
please prepare Communion Elements in a way that is meaningful to you

**WORDS OF WELCOME**

**INTROIT: Hymn #237**      *“In the Garden”* (Public Domain)

**Verse 1**

**I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,  
And the voice I hear falling on my ear the Son of God discloses.**

***Refrain:***

***And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.***

**GATHERING PRAYER :** 

L: As we gather, may we open our hearts to receive newness of life..

***All: We come with hope for renewal.***

L: In our time of worship, may we be inspired by God’s wisdom.

***All: We come seeking to learn and to draw closer to God..***

L: Come, let us worship, as the beloved children of God.

**INVOCATION:** 

L: Cultivating God, we come as your children to grow and learn, because you are our divine vine grower. God, we desire for you to abide within us, and for your grace to be revealed anew daily. As your branches, we ask you to nourish us for continued growth. May you transform our hearts and minds as we hear your Word, sing your praises, and engage in holy dialogue through prayer.

***All: May you help us to bear good fruit through the vine of Jesus Christ.***

***In Whose name we pray, Amen.***

**OPENING HYMN: #237 v.v. 2-3**      *“In the Garden”* (Public Domain)

**Verse 2**

**He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing,  
And the melody that He gave to me within my heart is ringing. (Refrain)**

***Refrain:***

***And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.***

**Verse 3**

**I’d stay in the garden with Him, though the night around me be falling,  
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe His voice to me is calling. (Refrain)**

## **SCRIPTURE:**

### **1 John 4:7–21 (NIV) - God's Love and Ours**

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

### **John 15:1-8 (NIV) - The Vine and the Branches**

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

## REFLECTION: *I Am the Vine, My Father Is the Gardener, You Are the Branches*

Now that the weather is finally warming up it will soon be planting season. My husband is the gardener in our family and he has already begun to turn over the soil and mixing in the dead leaves from last fall to replenish nutrients in the soil so that the plants can be well fed, thrive and bear much fruit. Any good gardener cares about the vitality of one's plants and tends to their needs continually, the feeding, the weeding, the watering, the staking up support where needed and even pruning where needed in order for them to not just survive, but to thrive and bear much fruit. In turn, branches that bear much fruit by the tender care of the gardener and being nourished by the plant gives honor to the gardener.

Often times people use today's lessons to judge who is in and who is out rather than understanding that when we don't live in the vine and receive its nourishment we wither. They miss out on the very intimate relationship between the Gardener, the Vine and the branches.

What our lesson from today does give us is a picture of a very intimate God who does not prune off from the vine other fruit just so one can get big. The vine is healthy enough to feed all the branches that bear fruit. It is not about making one big and starving all the rest but providing abundant life for all who abide in the vine. Kathryn Mathews describes the imagery of the vine in this manner *"it's intimate, and the vine shares with its branches the nutrients that sustain it, the life force of the whole plant. Even closer than the shepherd there on the hillside, this vine is one with the branches."*

([http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_april\\_29\\_2018](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_april_29_2018))

In this passage, Jesus was preparing his disciples for when he would no longer physically be with them. This was his way in John to let them know as he did in Matthew 28:20 "I will be with you always to the end of the age." It is like the promise that we hear in Isaiah 41:10 *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* That vine is a source of nourishment from which we need to continually feed. Why would we not want to abide in the vine and allow the true vine to live in us, strengthening us, helping us and upholding us as we travel through this life?

Nancy R. Blakely in her pastoral approach to her reflection as she considers the personal relationship each of us has with Jesus, the vine describes abiding in the vine as *"the way God "sustains" us and showers us with "shalom, which speaks of wholeness, completeness, and health." Here, close to the vine, immersed in shalom, we find not only nourishment but also hope and joy, and we let God's word "find a home in us through faithful devotion."*

*There, close to the vine, we find peace about all the things that we face, and all the things that we pray for, because our will, will be aligned with God's own will. She even reminds us of the value of that sometimes painful but redemptive pruning: "All that is extraneous is carefully and lovingly removed. What remains is centered and focused on God's word" (Feasting on the Word Year B, Vol. 2).*

Blakely reminds us that the Risen Christ in John's Gospel is warning his followers in every age and every setting not to "go it alone, trusting in their own strength. On their own they would be cut off from their life source. They would bear no fruit."

([http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_april\\_29\\_2018](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_april_29_2018))

How do we know that we are being fed by the vine? Let us take a look at 1 John 4:11-12; *“<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”* Love is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Love is the measure of faithfulness.

Oswaldo Vena shares these thoughts about abiding in God for the church: *“When the church forgets that its mission is to show its attachment to Jesus by uncompromisingly proclaiming the gospel in today’s society, then it becomes a disposable part of God’s vine. Yes, the words are hard but true. The church becomes an institution that tries to accommodate to the world rather than to transform it. It ceases to be attached to the source of life and becomes a mere institution seeking self-preservation.”*

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3631](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3631))

Being the church has never been about self-preservation but about allowing God to nourish us and to live within us and through us so that God’s will may be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks shares these thoughts on this scripture, in particular, bearing fruit and what it means for us as individuals and for the church: *“Bearing fruit means engaging for ourselves as individuals and as the church in those activities and tasks that recognize and invest in the goodness of God’s love by spreading that love to the neighbor whom we are called to love. The specifics of bearing fruit are left to the community as a whole and to each individual who receives the nurture that both Christ and the community provide.”*

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-of-easter-2/commentary-on-john-151-8-5>)

When I was installed as your pastor 7 years ago these were the two focus scriptures I chose for that service. *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.”* Psalm 127:1a and *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* John 15:5 I chose these scriptures because I do not want us to labor in vain. I want us always to remember that being the church is not about numbers, but about abiding in the true vine and allowing that true vine to abide in us so that others may come to know the true vine through our lives. I want us to trust in a very intimate God who will nourish us as long as we choose to feed on the vine that desires to nourish us, strengthen us, guide us and uphold us as we journey through this life.

I also chose those verses because I believe they fit right in with what we claim to be in our vision statement and covenant as a church and what I believe we are called to be as Christians.

### **Vision Statement:**

We the members of the Summit Congregational United Church of Christ seek, first and foremost, to live out the message of Jesus Christ in both our words and in our actions. Being led by the Holy Spirit, we invite others to join us as we endeavor to respond to God’s vision of a world where all people experience love, justice, and peace.

## **Our Covenant:**

As the membership of the Summit Congregational United Church of Christ, we do solemnly covenant and affirm that we are called to live in a loving, covenantal relationship with all humanity. We further assert that we embrace diversity in our congregation and community and affirm the dignity and worth of each person as a unique creation made in the image of God.

We honor as the most basic of our founding principles that discrimination, in any form, is incompatible with Christ's Gospel message of unconditional love. We recognize and accept the responsibility given to us by God, to care for one another, to hold in prayer this church and the church universal, and to seek equality and justice, love, and peace in all our relationships.

Jesus you are the true vine and we are the branches. Help us always to abide in you and allow you to abide in us so that others may come to know God through our lives just as God has been revealed through you. God we thank you that you love us not from afar, but so intimately that you have planted you Holy Spirit with in us as the vine to continually nourish us, strengthen us, uphold us, guide us and allow us to love as you love us. May all glory and honor be yours now and forever, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **A TIME OF PRAYER –** **LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS –** **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION:** ☪\*

L: O God, giver of life,

*All: We confess the times when we fail to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.  
forgive us when we ignore or we fail to see our neighbors in need.*

L: Abiding God, also forgive us when

*All: we reject love from others, and shut down completely; when we did not tend  
to our own needs, and denied ourselves of your forgiveness and grace.  
In our failures, we have refused your invitation to grow closer to you.  
In our confession, O God, we pray your abiding love  
be shown through the ways we love more fully. Amen.*

*A Moment of Silent Reflection*

## **COMMUNION HYMN OF ASSURANCE: #349 v.v. 1-3** “I Come with Joy”

### **SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION** **DIALOGUE**

L: Christ is Risen!

**All: Christ is risen indeed!**

L: Lift up your hearts.

**All: We lift them up to the Lord.**

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

## **PREFACE**

Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit; Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love: We praise you for Jesus Christ, who reminds us that even in fear-filled days, cloaked with the powers of death, your eternal love arises, and never leaves us. For we rejoice with all your people and with the angels, because life is stronger than death! As we proclaim the glory of your name:

## **SANCTUS**

***All: Holy is Jesus, God Incarnate, the Risen Christ, whose mercy gathers us together in community, whose grace meets us in our brokenness, and whose loving faithfulness gives us renewed hope.***

## **STORY OF THE MEAL**

In this meal, we remember Jesus, his promises, and the price he paid for who he was, what he said, and what he did; for our benefit. On the night before Jesus died, He took a loaf of bread, Gave thanks, broke it, and said, "Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Do this, in remembrance of me." After supper, Jesus took the cup and poured, saying, "This is the cup of the new covenant, poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me." In sharing this meal, we live out the mystery of our faith:

***All: We remember Christ's life of love, and friendship, and teaching, We remember Christ's dying, and rising to life again.***

## **PRAYER TO THE SPIRIT**

L: Bless this bread and this cup, the wheat and the grape, the farmer and the harvest, the seed and the sower. These simple elements are shared in community, so that we may taste and see your goodness and become one body in Christ.

***All: For it is through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, that all glory is yours, God most holy, now and forevermore. Amen.***

## **SHARING IN THE FEAST**

## **POST-COMMUNION PRAYER**

L: Let us pray:

***All: O Christ, we thank you for this feast of life. Fed by your love, and strengthened by your life; we humbly accept your call to go into this world to live with hope, and to share your joy. You commission us to feed as we have been fed, forgive as we have been forgiven, and love as we have been loved. Thanks be to God. Amen.***

## **INVITATION TO OFFERING:** ☪\*

L: Today we are invited to become deeply attached, close,  
and loyal as branches who are connected with Jesus Christ, our vine.

***All: In other words, we are to bear fruit with a spirit of love by helping each other, reaching out to each other, and encouraging each other in our daily faith pilgrimage.***

L: As it is written in the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, that “Two are better than one, because if they fall, one will lift up the other; but for the one who is alone and falls, there is not another to lift that person up.”

***All: So, let our offering lift up one another in God’s love that abides in times of sadness, loss and grief. Let our offering lift up one another in God’s love that abides in times of hopelessness, brokenness and failure.***

L: Let our offering be a thanksgiving of God’s love that abides within us times of hopefulness, forgiveness, unity, and peace.

***All: And let us accept God’s invitation to be ever-present in times of deep despair, and in times of great joy.***

L: Now, let us offer ourselves in gratitude and with generosity,  
as fruits representing the abiding goodness of God.

## **PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** ☪\*

L: Generous God,

***All: We offer you the fruits of our time, talents and resources in celebration of all that we have been given. Loving God, we give you thanks for all that we have and ask a special blessing on the fruits we have given back to help meet the needs of your beloved community. May the gifts nourish and strengthen the community to grow spiritually, emotionally, and physically. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.***

## **SUMM-IT UP:**

**Sparks – Sunday May 2 – Sparks ready for Pick-up**

**Tuesday – May 4 at 12:30 Bible Study Session 5 Easter for the Progressive Christian** via Sunday Zoom link. Next study will be Creation for the Progressive Christian. Please let me know if you are interested in joining in or having a book for personal study.

**Wednesday May 5<sup>th</sup> 6:30 p.m. – Zoom Fellowship Hour** via Wednesday Zoom Link

**CROP Walk – Saturday May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Registration at 9:30 walk to begin at 10:00 at Murphy Park.** Contributions can be put in an envelope marked CROP Walk with your name on it or checks can be made out to CWS Crop Walk and sent to the church or dropped off at church and we will see that your contribution gets into the envelopes of one of our walkers. If you are a person who donates per walker we will keep you updated as to the number of walkers.

**SENDING HYMN: #349 v.v. 4-5 “I Come with Joy”**

**CHARGE & BLESSING:** \*

Let us go forth thankful that we have come. Let us go forth renewed in God’s abiding love. And let us go forth rejoicing in the Good News, of Jesus Christ, whose love will never let us go. As we do that may the Lord bless and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you God’s peace.

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