

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *The Color of Redemption*, No. 5

Green

April 10, 2022

John 12:12-16; John 15:1-8 (NIV)

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!"

¹⁴ *Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:*

¹⁵ *"Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

¹⁶ *At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him...*

^{15:1} *"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 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.*

We're in the book of John this morning – two places, actually.

Since this is Palm Sunday, you almost have to read the account that explains why Palm Sunday is Palm Sunday, which was read for us from John 12 there.

It's the description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the place where He would come face to face with both His accusers and His cross.

It's recorded in all four gospels, and when you combine their accounts, you get the full picture of these moments where the crowds welcomed Jesus. Some people laid their coats on the ground in front of Him for the donkey He was riding to walk on. Others did the same with palm branches, and others took the branches and raised them in the air [wave palm branch], waving them in celebration.

All of it was an expression of honor, but this, the palm branch, was a symbol of victory. This was the greeting for a victorious king; the crowds all knew that, and so they were intentional in doing what they did.

They were more than just welcoming Jesus to the capital; they were honoring Him. They were very nearly worshipping Him, in a sense, because this crowd of people, coming out of Jerusalem, had heard of the things Jesus had been saying and doing – and especially the news of His very recent raising of this Lazarus from the dead. And so they were beginning to believe that He was, in fact, their hope.

They were beginning to believe that He was the one God promised to send to restore the dignity of their nation.

Everything Jesus did here fulfilled the prophecies of the savior sent of God. But the savior the prophets promised would be a savior of peace, and this was not really the sort of savior the people wanted – which is why they missed that part and all the signs that pointed to it.

People are like that, you know? Too often, we have our minds made up about something, and so we wind up seeing only what we want to see. That's what happened here.

The crowds were looking for a powerful savior, and so they certainly caught the power behind Jesus' raising of Lazarus, and it thrilled them and caused an enormous uproar.

What likely happened was that a crowd of people came from the city, came out of Jerusalem, because they heard Jesus was on His way.

This group then met a second group that was coming with Jesus from Bethany. And as these two groups collided and mingled together, you can imagine those from Jerusalem asking those from Bethany, "Hey, is it really true – what we've heard – that this guy brought a man back from the dead?" And then, of course, those of the Bethany crowd would answer, "Oh yeah! He really did – we saw it happen!"

So, the excitement about Jesus just continued to build and build there in the capital, to the extent that the Pharisees and Scribes and all those who were out to get Jesus threw up their hands and admitted to each other there in verse 19, ***"This is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"***

At this point, in their minds, all their efforts – all their work to try to discredit and undermine and deny Jesus, especially over the last year or so – seemed to be for nothing.

Ah, but how quickly things can change.

Crowds are fickle. Crowds are changeable, aren't they? Capricious! (You know, I just love that word, and I don't often get to use it – but it fits perfectly here.)

Crowds are capricious, impulsive, unpredictable – like the weather in Kentucky. On any given day, you never really know what you're going to get.

On this day, Palm Sunday, for the crowds the color of redemption was green [hold up palm leaf] – palm frond green, to be precise.

Because this was the symbol of success, you see? This was the symbol of the redemption of their beloved nation, because of how all this that Jesus did fulfilled their nationalized prophecies.

But – the thing was – there was far more to those prophecies than the crowds were ready to receive.

And we know that, because just hours after this moment, Jesus appeals to another symbol: one that is also green, but one that turned out to be nowhere near as popular or fun as the palm branch was for the crowds.

If we move over to Chapter 15, we see that at this point, Jesus has, more or less, gone into hiding – from all but his disciples.

We see, back in the middle of Chapter 12 how, after Jesus clarifies that He is not the national redeemer they believed Him to be – wanted Him to be, the crowds began to turn against Him, an all within just a matter of hours.

That gave renewed momentum to the Jewish leaders' efforts to silence Jesus, and so Jesus ducks out of public life, gathers His disciples around Him and declares to them, among many other things, the words there in Chapter 15, verse 1, "*I am the true vine.*"

"I am the true vine."

Now, vines, of course (specifically grapevines), were as common as sheep in Jesus' day and in Israel's history, so anything Jesus said about vines would have been very familiar.

But the vine identity that Jesus takes on here is far larger than just some grapevine.

You see, all through Israel's history, the prophets compared the nation of Israel, herself, to a vine.

For example:

Psalm 80 says, "*God brought a vine out of Egypt, drove the nations out and planted it, cleared ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.*"¹

The whole first part of Isaiah 5 speaks of Israel as the vine of God's vineyard.²

The prophet Jeremiah calls Israel a choice vine planted by God.³

Ezekiel 17 talks of how Israel was planted by God and given every advantage to live and thrive and succeed.⁴

Hosea 10 calls Israel a spreading vine that brought forth fruit for itself.⁵

The vine had become a symbol for the nation of Israel, so much so that the emblem on the coins of the Maccabean area was the vine. The Mishnah describes a great, golden vine displayed in the Temple as you entered the doors of the Holy Place.

So, Israel was commonly thought of as God's vine. Why?

From the earliest of days, God intended for Israel to be – He raised her up to be – this verdant, life-giving, redemptive presence to the world around her, so that the nations and peoples of this broken world would look at Israel's rich and peaceful life and example – and in *her*, they would see God.

God intended that as people looked to Israel, they would see God's way to live and to thrive and to relate to creation and to worship and to treat others.

God wanted to reveal Himself to His world through this nation.

Israel was to be God's plant, you might say, representing Him to His world.

The problem was, though, that the vine never did what it was supposed to do.

The vine wouldn't do what it was supposed to do.

[Point to table with green vine plant spread out across it.] This "guy" here normally sits in my office here at the church, up on top of the shelves above my desk. He's some sort of philodendron, I think.

Patti Fiskeaux gave Phil here to me to me a long time ago.

Actually, this is vine #2, I think. I think the first one died, so this is Phil, Jr., or maybe even Phil, III – I don't remember.

Anyway, it's rooted in this pot here, and this pot sits high up on the top of my bookcase. One shoot of it grows to the right and one shoot grows to the left. And honestly, right now, I'm tempted to say that one of those shoots does what it's supposed to, and one is undisciplined and goes all over the place, but I won't go there, for political reasons.

The truth is, both right and left shoots grow like crazy. Sometimes they get away from me in that, and I realize that one side or the other has grown clear down to the floor and is crawling across the floor.

Other times, they'll curl up behind the bookcase where you can't see them, so when you pull it a whole lot more comes out than you're expecting. I have to keep an eye on it all the time and keep it directed and trimmed, or it will end up all over the place.

God had this same problem with His vine, you see? Israel wouldn't grow the way she was supposed to and ended up winding all over the place, getting into things she didn't need to get into, doing things she never should have done.

In fact, in every single place in Scripture where Israel is called "God's vine," the same passage also laments how unruly and undisciplined a vine she was.

God's vine was disobedient.

It was untrainable.

It was stiff-necked, you see, because far more often than not, it simply *would not do* as God wanted it to do, which meant that it was unfruitful. It did not produce the results that God intended it to produce, which was to be a light to the nations – to represent God faithfully to the world, and in doing so, to draw the nations of the world to Himself.

And so, because of that, time and again, God's vine suffered the consequences of her disobedient behavior. She was reprimanded; she was punished; she was disciplined; she fell under the control of other nations and peoples; over and over she suffered – all because she would not consistently listen to God.

¹ Psalm 80: 8-9

² Isaiah 5:1-7

³ Jeremiah 2:21

⁴ Ezekiel 17:1-8

⁵ Hosea 10:1

She failed to achieve the great things God wanted to do *in* her.

She failed to become all God intended *for* her.

She failed to lead world around her to God and to redemption.

But now, in the midst of the wreckage that was the vine of Israel, here is Jesus announcing a *major* change.

This is one of the most significant things that Jesus ever says.

You see, Jesus is declaring here that the old vine has lost its position and responsibility and place of privilege, and that God has created a new vine in Israel's place.

There's a new vine in town, if you will.

A new vine, that *has done already* and that *will faithfully do* all that God asks—all that God says.

There is a new vine—that will grow in the right places and directions.

There is a new vine that will bear the fruit of representing God to the world for the sake of relationship and redemption.

And Jesus says *He is that vine. "I am the true vine."*

Jesus is, now, God's redemptive, representative in this world.

Don't miss the significance of this. It's hard to overstate.

Barclay puts it this way. He writes:

It's as if Jesus said, "You think that because you belong to the nation of Israel that you are a branch of the true vine of God.

"You think that just because you are a Jew, and a member, as you think, of the chosen people—you are, because of your race and birth and nationality, a branch of the true vine.

"But you are not.

"The nation is a degenerate vine, as all your prophets saw, and so the vine has been replaced, and I am that replacement. I am the *true* vine.

"It is not the fact that you are a Jew that will save you.

"The only thing that can save you is to have an intimate, living relationship with me.

"In order to see God, you must see Him through me.

"In order to have relationship with Him," Jesus says, "you must be attached to me."⁶

Jesus was with only His disciples when He spoke of being this vine—which is a good thing, because if the Jewish leaders had heard Jesus saying this, they would have lost it completely and tried to stone Him then and there, so offensive would this have been to them.

Now, Jesus then goes on and talks more about our attachment to Him as the Vine—about our relationship with Him—from verse one there in Chapter 15, Jesus talks about how all in Christ are branches. He is the vine. We and all who receive Jesus: we are branches of the Vine. We are tied to Him in that way.

Jesus talks about how God superintends the vine: how God the Father shapes it and moves it.

He talks about how God the Father cuts off the branches that are unproductive—the branches that bear no fruit.

Jesus talks about how God will prune, train and discipline the branches who *do* bear fruit, because, you see, it's God's intention and design that we are to be fruitful, and increasingly so.

It's God's design that we branches who are attached to Jesus the vine: God intends that we be faithful representatives of Him, of God the Father, to our world.

And we can only do this—we can only *be* this—if we remain: 1) firmly attached to Jesus, and 2) faithfully obedient to Him.

Jesus plainly says, "*No branch bears fruit by itself - apart from the vine.*"

In verses 4 and 5 there, Jesus says, "*Apart from me, you can do nothing.*"

In fact, Jesus says if we don't remain attached to Him, we're like a branch that is thrown away and burned.

Jesus is not only the source of our life and fruitfulness here on earth, He's the source of our eternal life.

Apart from Him, we die in every way possible, because He is the vine; He is our link to God the Father.

Jesus' own source of life and success is His ongoing, intimate connection to God the Father. We see that all through His earthly life.

And so, in the very same way, *our* source of life and success is our ongoing and intimate connection with Jesus, the vine.

And to have that, to keep that, to nurture that: that's our choice.

Jesus would hardly say all of this that He does, if we had no choice in the matter.

You see, all this business of *remaining in Him*: "remaining" does not happen automatically. We have to *intend* to remain, just as in any relationship in our lives. To remain in this *in-Him relationship*: we have to *intend* to do that.

And through the next verses there, Jesus not only helps us understand what it means to "remain in Him," but He also assures us that as we remain in Him, He will remain in us. As we choose to remain, He chooses to remain as well.

And maybe all of that should be a series for after Easter, *Remaining in the Vine*, or *Choosing to Remain*.

We'll see about that.

But for today, let's just understand this: the reason it makes sense for us to use this symbol [hold up palm branch] of victory and celebration is because Jesus declares Himself this symbol: the vine [point vine plant on table].

Jesus is all that God wanted His people Israel to be—and more.

Jesus is the vine that is rooted in and attached to God, the Father.

Jesus is the vine that reveals God to this world—God's desires and character and values.

⁶ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John*, Volume 2. St. Andrews Press, Edinburgh, Scotland. 1955. p.201-22.

And Jesus is the vine that allows us – that welcomes us – to become grafted-in branches, such that we can become part of God’s story – God’s lineage. We can be adopted into God’s very family by being grafted into this Vine of Jesus.

And in doing so, Jesus will become our source of life, our way of salvation, our assurance of forgiveness, and our means of redemption, you see?

Jesus accomplished what Israel, the nation, never could.

He listened and obeyed God the Father in every single thing, and so He has become the true and living vine. And He is absolutely green today with the power to forgive any sin and to redeem any life for now and forever.

It’s the *vine*, you see, that makes the *palm* possible.

We celebrate Jesus – we wave our palms for Him today [raise palm branch] – because He is the way to forgiveness, and He is the way to redemption.

The crowds didn’t understand it then, but we can understand it today.

We see Jesus in His fullness, and we understand that the color of redemption is vine green [point to vine].

Are you attached to Him? Are you attached to Him? If you are, then you have a reason to celebrate!

If you’re not, you can be, today. He will forgive your sins, and He will graft you in, and He will make you a branch of God’s family.

Closing Prayer: Would you pray with me?

Father, we thank you for sending Jesus. We thank You that He fulfilled every single prophecy in the perfect way. We thank you particularly today that He is the vine, that He was the perfect sacrifice. And that He is the one that attaches us to God, if we will choose Him in our lives.

Lord, help us to celebrate that. Those of us who know You and are attached to Him, help us to give You the praise that You are due. And Father, I pray that if there is anyone here today that is not attached to Your Son Jesus, the Vine, Lord, I pray they would simply ask for You to prove this true in their lives. That they would ask to be forgiven of their sins, and they would ask to be grafted in, attached to the vine that gives life, to the vine that provides forgiveness and redemption. Lord, thank you that the color of redemption is green, and that we can all participate fully in it today. In Your name we pray, Jesus, Amen.

Closing Song: *Hosanna*

Benediction: It’s hard to wave a vine–like pushing a rope. You can’t do it. But you can wave a palm. Let’s wave our palms today with our lives. Let’s be the branches of the vine that Christ intends us to be. Let’s live and show the world, the world around us, the redeeming power of Jesus. Thanks for coming to worship today. The Lord bless and keep you.