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“Welcome to the Table of the Lord”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 6, 2012

Acts 8:26–40; John 15:1–8

We gather on this Sunday morning not only to witness the celebration of the sacrament of baptism in the life of **Logan Turner**, but also to celebrate with these youngsters before me their reception of Holy Communion at the Table of the Lord’s Supper. They have been in preparation to receive these gifts of the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation in Holy Communion in deeper and more meaningful ways for many weeks. I commend **Marilyn** and the parents of these children for the manner in which they have been reflecting on and learning about the meanings associated with their participation in this holy meal of remembrance of the Easter mystery.

You are being offered a wonderful invitation to a different life, a new life through your on-going reception of this holy sacrament. A wonderful invitation that is life-long. All members of the congregation have had that privilege to be nourished and strengthened by the food that Jesus claims to be for us: food that nourishes and strengthens just like the food that you eat every day to nourish and strengthen your physical bodies. Here, in this sacrament, the bread and the wine offered become for you an opportunity to be in an intimate communion of life and fruitfulness with the source of all Life. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. He is the one that plants and tends to us. Communion and this meal is a reminder of that love that sustains, a true steadfast love.

Now you’ve seen this image before. Jesus says in the Gospel today that you are his disciples as branches on his vine. God is the vine grower, and Jesus is the vine, and you are the branches. Now that is a figure of speech rooted in our experience of the working the land. Have you ever seen a vineyard? North Carolina has a lot of

vineyards, and they grow grapes. One makes wine from grapes: you squash them, you ferment them, and they become a beverage that is called wine. All through North Carolina, there are famous vineyards that make great wines. Jesus uses the word “vineyard” often as an image. It’s a word that Jesus uses in an allegorical way today which means that each element is equated with someone or something else. He tries to connect to individual people or persons a meaning to the language he uses here. When he says, “My father is the vine grower,” he is speaking about God. Then when he says in the very first words of John 15, “I am the true vine, and my father is the vine grower, and I want you to abide in me and me in you because I am the vine and you are the branches,” he is telling us that our discipleship with him involves “abiding or remaining” in that relationship as a branch does to its vine. So here the language of vines and branches and vineyards help us understand the meaning of our connection to and our relationship with Jesus as one who gives us life.

This is the season of Easter. We celebrate the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus, and throughout the course of Easter, we spend fifty days reflecting on the fact that Christ Jesus, the risen Lord, is present with us. One of the ways in which he is present with us is in this holy sacrament, where he nourishes and strengthens us.

I was thinking the other day about some images of life that create a sense of scattered activity and “passing by” one another quickly. I don’t know about your **schools**, but when I drop my daughter off at her school early in the morning, it is full of scattered activity. It is ordered chaos: everyone is running from here to there, running to their lockers and their classrooms. I’m looking around like they all know what they’re doing, but they’re passing each other in a transient sort of way. I was thinking also of the image of an **airport**. In the airports, people are moving and going and they seem scattered, and there’s all this activity. The message today is that you are invited along with all of your mothers and fathers and the members of this congregation to be part of different life, a new life that continues the journey of faith. I rejoice with you; I congratulate you. Here is what that invitation looks like.

This wonderful invitation to the Lord’s Table means you will be connected to God, and with all the other branches of the vine in the unity of the Church. You are part of this family of faith and the larger family of faith that we call the church in a united way: **a connected life**. But your life is also **a rooted life** because all the relationships you have with your family and your parents’ love speaks to steady,

reliable guidance and direction. We commit ourselves to you to have a rooted life of steady and reliable support as branches of the true vine.

Finally, I want you to recognize that the lives you have as one in communion with Christ is meant to be a **productive life**. It's a big word, but Jesus uses, in this Gospel text, the words "bearing fruit" several times. He wants you to bear fruit. He wants you to be part of the living branch that brings about peace and justice and compassion and care for one another. Remember, part of the benefit of your being part of the vine is that you are going to be well connected. You are going to be rooted with steady, reliable relationships with people who love you and care for you, and finally, we hope that your life-giving connection and your life-giving relationship with Jesus, the risen Lord, will produce a lot of great fruit in your lives and in the lives of this community.

This is a wonderful invitation. Appreciate it, enjoy it, be nourished by it, and take advantage of it, now and for the rest of your lives. Amen.