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C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

C. S. Lewis, a British writer, literary scholar, and Anglican lay theologian, who I'm pretty sure you all have heard of and encountered some form of his writing somewhere along your own literary journey has said that:

There are far better things ahead, than any we leave behind.

This quote from Lewis sounds lovely, especially when it's placed over a scene from nature and hung on our wall. For the most part I would agree with Lewis on this but the problem then is that we totally disregard the things we leave behind...the very things that define us and make us who we are become totally disregarded.

I say this not because I want to refute Lewis, Lord knows I am not worthy to even think I could compare or raise an argument against this brilliant writer. I say the things behind us are just as important because there seems to be a trend in our culture lately that says, if I haven't seen it with my own eyes, then it did happen or I will not believe it to be so. Or...if I haven't seen it online or on YouTube then it didn't happen or it doesn't exist. It is frightening to me how much we disregard our history and our traditions these days. And while this trend is manifest within our culture, it is ever more present in our churches.

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Before we lop things off or break things, or burn things down, perhaps we can look past our go-fast attitude and ask, do we fully understand the apostolic tradition that our church is built on? Do we fully understand the things we do and why we do them? Do we fully understand what makes us Lutherans?

To be the church is to understand what the church is and how it got here and why we do the things we do when we worship. Perhaps before we throw it all away and burn it all down, maybe we ought to look closer at *WHO* does the pruning and what it is *we* are attempting to "prune" or throw away and make sure its not the very essence of who we are as a church.

Listen again to the opening of our Gospel lesson:

Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my *Father* is the vinegrower. ² He (*The Father*) removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2)

Right from the start of this passage there seems to be a quantitative overtone that fits rather nicely into our thinking about burning down the old in order to make it new and improved and this will produce more...or so we think. We assume our personal likes and dislikes will be served better if we move fast and breakdown the old "stuff" we don't like. And the new "stuff" we like will certainly cure the church of all her modern-day ills...or so we think. Of course, we want to be the "good" branch or should I say, we want to be the "new and improved" branch as opposed to the "bad" branch that gets cut off. Here is where our "contemporary" thinking and our go-fast gimmicks get us in judgmental trouble. This passage is NOT about judgment and condemnation, rather this passage about vines and branches is a statement of truth...if we cut it off, it will die...if we cut a branch off a fruit tree of any sort, it will no longer bear fruit, it will die. Are we then as the church, cutting off our own nose with our new contemporary attitude to spite our face?

In this Gospel lesson, Jesus is reminding us that the *Father* removes every branch that bears no fruit...we don't. We associate what Jesus is saying about pruning with our contemporary or our new ways and attitudes and we begin to do our own "pruning" rather than the One who is the vine-dresser...God. We hear a passage like this and we then feel duty-bound to "prune" or cut out the dead wood to make room for the good, the better, the new and improved version. But if we look back to the original text, that is if we haven't thrown it away or burned it with our disregard, the word prune in the Greek text is *καθαίρει* which doesn't necessarily mean "prune" it can be parsed out to mean, to clean or to make clean, or clear. It is the Father that does the pruning, or the cleaning, it is the Father that makes us clean.

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We are made clean; we are pruned by the very Word of God in Jesus Christ along with the water of our Baptism. And I return to the last supper when Jesus washes the disciples' feet in John's Gospel:

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Jesus with the vine and branch image is teaching us that there are no free-standing individuals or congregations...we are all connected and we all depend on one another. The fruitfulness of each individual "branch" depends on its relationship to the "vine" and each branch proceeds from the vine.

Each week during our Eastertide we have been confessing our faith with the words of the Nicene Creed. In that particular creed we confess our faith in a Triune God using this very image of the branches that proceed from the vine in a phrase called the *Filioque Phrase*. *Filioque* is Latin and means: "and from the Son." When we confess using this image of one thing proceeding from another like the branch from the vine...we are declaring that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son.

Just after that very declaration we then confess that we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church...one universal and apostolic Church. When we confess this we are declaring that we believe that we, the church, continue the teachings and mission of the apostles, upon whom Jesus founded the Church. In other words, we proceed with the very same mission Jesus gives to the apostles or we proceed as the branch that proceeds from the vine. Moreover, if we say we believe at all...we then give up our individuality and we believe ourselves to be part of something much more than ourselves as an individual.

A branch is not an individual, it is part of the vine...an individual sitting here today in this church, right now, is no longer an individual, you are the congregation, you are the church, the church that is the very body of Jesus Christ, the very vine that takes us directly to God the Father. We individuals are a congregation, and as any congregation...we have our faith fed and nurtured by the very Son of God, the Son who proceeds from God feeds us in this Holy Meal.

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When we are given the bread and wine, it literally proceeds from the Last Supper. When we hear the words, “and gave it to his disciples...to eat” and “gave it for all to drink” the verb “gave” tells us that this giving of bread and wine is a continuous action, it literally proceeds from the very night Jesus Christ is betrayed. And once again, if we look at this through a vine and branch image we see we are connected directly to God through Jesus Christ each time we share this bread and cup in our Holy Eucharist. If we say we don’t believe, or we say we can be an individual who doesn’t need a church, then we have cut ourselves off from our lineage, our past, or the very vine that is our faith’s life source.

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Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I guess there are far better things ahead, no doubt...the things ahead such as the branch that is the Good News of Jesus Christ that connects us all to forgiveness and salvation, but let’s NOT forget...all of that proceeds from the vine, the very beginning, God...who as the vine is not only our life source that saves us and keeps us but God also loves us and continues to embrace us through the very procedures, practices, and rituals that is the fruit of this One Holy catholic and apostolic church that is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ that makes us all branches of God’s eternal vine.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

C. S. Lewis, a British writer, literary scholar, and Anglican lay theologian, who I'm pretty sure you all have heard of and encountered some form of his writing somewhere along your own literary journey has said that:

There are far better things ahead, than any we leave behind.

This quote from Lewis sounds lovely, especially when it's placed over a scene from nature and hung on our wall. For the most part I would agree with Lewis on this but the problem then is that we totally disregard the things we leave behind...the very things that define us and make us who we are become totally disregarded.

I say this not because I want to refute Lewis, Lord knows I am not worthy to even think I could compare or raise an argument against this brilliant writer. I say the things behind us are just as important because there seems to be a trend in our culture lately that says, if I haven't seen it with my own eyes, then it did happen or I will not believe it to be so. Or...if I haven't seen it online or on YouTube then it didn't happen or it doesn't exist. It is frightening to me how much we disregard our history and our traditions these days. And while this trend is manifest within our culture, it is ever more present in our churches.

The contemporary church, and what I mean specifically by the "contemporary church" is the newer pastors, THAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED, in the Lutheran Church, seem to have a Mark Zuckerberg mentality. Mark Zukerberg, the creator of Facebook coined a motto that said, "Move fast and break things." I believe Zukerberg's motto is aimed directly at and or rails against the things that exist now, like our institutions and or our institutional ways. And with little or no consideration of what things are and what they mean, we move fast to break them down. We what to burn down this notion of "this is the way we have always done it" and move quickly to gimmicks that we think will draw people back into the church with no regard to tradition or history. But what bothers me the most about this motto, "Move fast and break things," it, like our attitudes about the past, say nothing about building things back up. I think we all know how dangerous it can be to never change, but there can only be change when we fulling understand what it is we are changing. I mention all of this because this is how we hear our Gospel lesson today.

Before we lop things off or break things, or burn things down, perhaps we can look past our go-fast attitude and ask, do we fully understand the apostolic tradition that our church is built on? Do we fully understand the things we do and why we do them? Do we fully understand what makes us Lutherans?

To be the church is to understand what the church is and how it got here and why we do the things we do when we worship. Perhaps before we throw it all away and burn it all down, maybe we ought to look closer at *WHO* does the pruning and what it is *we* are attempting to "prune" or throw away and make sure its not the very essence of who we are as a church.

Listen again to the opening of our Gospel lesson:

Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my *Father* is the vinegrower. ² He (*The Father*) removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2)

Right from the start of this passage there seems to be a quantitative overtone that fits rather nicely into our thinking about burning down the old in order to make it new and improved and this will produce more...or so we think. We assume our personal likes and dislikes will be served better if we move fast and breakdown the old "stuff" we don't like. And the new "stuff" we like will certainly cure the church of all her modern-day ills...or so we think. Of course, we want to be the "good" branch or should I say, we want to be the "new and improved" branch as opposed to the "bad" branch that gets cut off. Here is where our "contemporary" thinking and our go-fast gimmicks get us in judgmental trouble. This passage is NOT about judgment and condemnation, rather this passage about vines and branches is a statement of truth...if we cut it off, it will die...if we cut a branch off a fruit tree of any sort, it will no longer bear fruit, it will die. Are we then as the church, cutting off our own nose with our new contemporary attitude to spite our face?

In this Gospel lesson, Jesus is reminding us that the *Father* removes every branch that bears no fruit...we don't. We associate what Jesus is saying about pruning with our contemporary or our new ways and attitudes and we begin to do our own "pruning" rather than the One who is the vine-dresser...God. We hear a passage like this and we then feel duty-bound to "prune" or cut out the dead wood to make room for the good, the better, the new and improved version. But if we look back to the original text, that is if we haven't thrown it away or burned it with our disregard, the word prune in the Greek text is *καθαίρει* which doesn't necessarily mean "prune" it can be parsed out to mean, to clean or to make clean, or clear. It is the Father that does the pruning, or the cleaning, it is the Father that makes us clean.

Listen again to what Jesus is saying to us:

² He (*the Father*) removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes (*cleans*) to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

This is also heard in the exchange between Jesus and Peter earlier in this Gospel during the last supper when Jesus washes the disciples' feet:

⁸ Peter said to [Jesus], 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' (John 13:8)

We are made clean; we are pruned by the very Word of God in Jesus Christ along with the water of our Baptism. And I return to the last supper when Jesus washes the disciples' feet in John's Gospel:

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13:12-15)

What Jesus is showing us in this passage and in today's Gospel is NOT about us as individuals; Jesus is showing us the connection we have with our past and with each other. Jesus is showing us the importance of interrelationship, the importance community, and the importance of mutuality and indwelling... with each other...and the importance of congregation.

Jesus with the vine and branch image is teaching us that there are no free-standing individuals or congregations...we are all connected and we all depend on one another. The fruitfulness of each individual "branch" depends on its relationship to the "vine" and each branch proceeds from the vine.

Each week during our Eastertide we have been confessing our faith with the words of the Nicene Creed. In that particular creed we confess our faith in a Triune God using this very image of the branches that proceed from the vine in a phrase called the *Filioque Phrase*. *Filioque* is Latin and means: "and from the Son." When we confess using this image of one thing proceeding from another like the branch from the vine...we are declaring that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son.

Just after that very declaration we then confess that we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church...one universal and apostolic Church. When we confess this we are declaring that we believe that we, the church, continue the teachings and mission of the apostles, upon whom Jesus founded the Church. In other words, we proceed with the very same mission Jesus gives to the apostles or we proceed as the branch that proceeds from the vine. Moreover, if we say we believe at all...we then give up our individuality and we believe ourselves to be part of something much more than ourselves as an individual.

A branch is not an individual, it is part of the vine...an individual sitting here today in this church, right now, is no longer an individual, you are the congregation, you are the church, the church that is the very body of Jesus Christ, the very vine that takes us directly to God the Father. We individuals are a congregation, and as any congregation...we have our faith fed and nurtured by the very Son of God, the Son who proceeds from God feeds us in this Holy Meal.

When we gather around this table we hear these words:

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread,
and gave thanks; broke it,
and gave it to his disciples,
saying: Take and eat;
this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper,

he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink,
saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

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