

# BEARING FRUIT

God of abiding love, you choose us as your servants and dare to call us friends: take our fragmented hearts, commanding them to love, making whole our joy, our life reborn in you; through Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us. *Amen.*

Based on *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, Steven Shakespeare

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## THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

*1 John 5:1-6, Psalm 98, John 15:9-17*

MAY 09, 2021

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. COURTNEY TAN, PRIEST

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*“It was not you who chose me; it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit!”*

Isn't it an amazing feeling to be chosen, to be seen as someone who is valuable, worthwhile, has a contribution to make? As a gardener, I love the idea of bearing fruit: it signifies a natural process, one of seeding, sprouting, budding, blossoming, integrating and interacting, followed by a slow growing of something which feeds others and leads, ultimately, to new life.

Yet, being chosen comes with expectations, our own, and those of other people. Expectations give us purpose, and meeting them can

bring joy. However, when we are unable to meet the mark set, we can feel fragmented, insufficient to a task. Just as each year I wait for my seeds to sprout and watch my trees for the first buds, and the setting of tiny fruit, delightedly and anxiously tracking the progress of growing and ripening, so we watch ourselves and may feel watched by others.

The disciples, have been appointed to go and bear lasting fruit by following the example Jesus has set. They are told to “Live on in my love.” To continue to show up in love as Jesus has repeatedly done for them and others. This sounds idyllic, but, as anyone who has ever been in a relationship, ever

loved a friend, parent, spouse, child, or partner knows, living in love, showing up in love, can be immensely difficult at times. It doesn't seem as if it should be that difficult, after all love is a good thing, isn't it? Then one really looks at what love entails. Just like gardening it is a process of nurturing, supporting, setting boundaries, pruning. Irrespective of how rewarding our encounters are, there will be both joyful and tough times, and moments of acute anxiety.

There are occasions in life when something happens differently from the way we expect it to or feel it should. Sometimes we expect love and support to be available or desired but it doesn't seem to be. Sometimes, this is a call to question our perception, to see what we need to prune or change in order for an interaction to be life-giving. It can be scary, disruptive, threatening to stand up and be separate, to follow a different path from the loudest voices. It may be tempting to devalue our own need, to simply go along with others in order to feel accepted. However, in doing so we minimize our potential to bear fruit, our ability to feed others. The fruit we do not bear could be the one voice which needs to be heard, the one which would make a real difference to the way things ultimately turn out.

On other occasions love is a serendipitous gift, received or given when we least expect it. These are the moments that are transformational; when we bloom, and ripen into something beyond what we were, when we have the potential to help others to grow also. The theologian and philosopher Albert Schweitzer writes, "In everyone's life at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should be grateful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit."

Jesus' love is a call to an all-inclusive love, one which rekindles the inner spirit within those we encounter. It is a call to love all people equally, irrespective of their circumstance, their beliefs, whether or not one naturally intersects with a person, or whether it is convenient or socially acceptable

Tertullian tells us, "Christians are made, not born." Being a Christian is a clear choice, there is no coercion to show up. We make a conscious choice to choose one path over another. We are not Christians because our parents were (though they may have been), but because we personally made a decision, a commitment. We choose, again and again, to follow the 'greatest commandment of all' – to love one another and to live on in the love which Jesus has shown us. This

path, difficult though it may sometimes be, is all that is required for our joy to be complete. It is not a shortcut, but a slow maturing from the seed which God has planted. This seed, contains all the necessary blueprints for life and growth, for us to reach our full potential to be loved into where we are not yet and to love others similarly.

In the words of the poem by J. Janda,

we have the  
potential

we are the  
potential

to bloom  
because of  
Christ  
our earth  
because of  
Christ  
our atmosphere

we are the seed  
from  
the Father's hand  
we are  
the breaking shell  
sending  
down roots reaching  
our shoots  
up-stretching toward  
our Maker

This is "the long slow work of God,"<sup>1</sup> which is our work also, to love one another and to live on, reborn and joyful, in the love which God shows us.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



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