

## April 28, 2024 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

### “THE VINEGROWER” by Pastor Julio Romero

#### Gospel: John 15:1-8

I would like to start this sermon with the question, where do we find the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we find it in the pages of the Bible, in the church ministry to the poor, in the fellowship of all Christians and in their service to the sick and to those who mourn?

Yes, we find it in all those places and many others, but what about in the trunk of a tree or in a vineyard? Can we find the Good News there? The answer is yes, the Gospel can be found there too, although we have to unpack it a little bit.

Early last month was the time for the cooking of maple syrup, a process that begins with collecting the sap from the trunks of maple trees, where you tap the tree to get most of the sap.

You never tap the branches because you won't get much, plus they are too high above the ground. So, it is through the trunk that the sap is distributed to all the branches, and for the branches to produce fruit they have to be connected to the trunk of the tree.

A branch that is cut off from the trunk or stem of a tree dies, bears no fruit. This is true for every tree and every branch, so for a branch to have life and produce fruit, it has to remain connected to the stem. The quality of the fruit that the tree will provide will depend on the kind of tree the branch is attached to.

We normally taste the fruit of trees, never the sap. God has been so generous in providing all kinds of fruit to make our lives more pleasant, but as far as I know it is only from the maple tree that we get the opportunity to taste the sap.

So, where is the good news in this parable that talks about a vineyard, branches and fruit? I would like to start reflecting on the very first line in this Gospel. God is described as the “vinegrower”. Even if we don't know much about vineyards, we have a good idea of what a “vinegrower” does.

The vinegrower is the one who prepares the soil, plants, fertilizes, waters the plants, clears the weeds, prunes and collects the harvest and if he doesn't do it himself, he oversees the whole operation. A vinegrower is the one in charge, but also the one who is totally invested in the success, care and good health of all the plants in the vineyard.

He is the one who is always alert to any need or threat to his vineyard.

And yes, there was a threat to God's Vineyard for which He had to act. That was the threat of a fungus, a fungus that was damaging and destroying his Vineyard. That fungus is called "sin", so he needed to plant a special Vine that would stand the threat of that fungus, and that Vine, that tree, is our Lord Jesus Christ.

He came to give to the Vineyard a new life, to eliminate the threat of the fungus that would kill and completely destroy the entire Vineyard.

It was the hope of the Vinegrower that any branch that would come out of this new Vine would bring good fruit, would resist the fungus, and be fed from the sap that flows from the stem of the new tree, the new Vine.

In baptism and in faith, God attaches us to this Vine named Jesus Christ, but sometimes circumstances of life, whether internal or external to us, can make us separate from the Vine. And this is what the Lord Jesus is warning us about in this parable.

Look, for example, at what a storm with strong winds can do to a healthy vineyard: it can break its branches. Big storms can detach the branches from the vine, big storms can break and blow big branches off the main stems of trees.

Experts on storms even give colors to rate the intensity of storms, and as we journey through life, we learn to cope and navigate through all kinds of storms that threaten to separate us from and lose faith in the Vine.

Each one of the storms we go through are painted a different color of severity: green, yellow, orange and red.

A green storm could be when you are getting ready for work, or maybe just a trip to the grocery store, you find that you have misplaced the car keys or your wallet.

A yellow storm could be a bump up in traffic or maybe the car won't start, and you are going to be late for a very important appointment.

An orange storm could be when a family member has a health emergency such as a heart attack or some other life-threatening trauma.

In a red storm, life just stops and nothing else seems to matter when it hits, like news that a loved one has just died unexpectedly.

Sometimes, these kinds of storms can make us lose faith in a God who really cares about us, so we stop believing, we stop caring and producing the fruit of the Vine that sustains us.

If you have been in a red colored storm and have not lost faith, have not detached yourself from the Vine who is our Lord Jesus Christ, you are truly a disciple, you are indeed a believer in the Living God.

Storms are just one example of many things that can detach us from the Vine. How will we know when we have detached ourselves from the Vine? The answer is found in this parable: we will know by the kind of fruit we are producing.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God won't separate Himself from us. God will hold on to us. He is the Vinegrower who loves His Vineyard and every single branch in it. We might distance ourselves from Him, but He won't from us.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 8, wrote:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We will always be loved, cared for and reached out to by God's hand to be attached again to the Vine. God doesn't leave us hopeless, incapable of producing good fruit when we are attached to Him. The sap of the Holy Spirit that flows from the Resurrected Christ enables us to grow and produce the fruit that we and the world need.

The invitation that Jesus makes in this Gospel is to not give up, no matter what the color of the storms we navigate through. Keep the faith, don't dismay, don't distance yourself from Him, remain attached to Him. **Amen.**