

Connections: Real or Imaginary?

Intro. Judging by the beautiful yards around here, there are a lot of gardeners and even a few Master Gardeners among us. Others just enjoy the *fruit* of the vine. I am a dangerous amateur. When I moved here I inherited a Crepe Myrtle that had been ignored. Its branches had become intertwined in all directions. The first year I trimmed it a little bit; I didn't want to shock it. The second year I pruned a lot more branches. This year I trimmed it again. It is sprouting new leaves which is a good sign I haven't killed it.

I. This image of the vine and branches was very familiar to the Lord's listeners. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel was referred to as a vine planted by God; cared for when Israel followed God and

uprooted when it did not. The Lord was trying to explain to his disciples the necessity of staying connected to him and to the Father. The relationship between a vine and branches was easily understood by them. But his point quickly shifted from a nice, safe *image* to the disciples' personal relationship with him. In verse three, the Lord said, "You are already pruned because of the word I spoke to you." Everything after that is directed at the disciples, and including those today. It is a challenge and a warning. Remaining or abiding means there is a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the Father, the Lord and disciples [F. Maloney, S.D.B., *Sacra Pagina*, John]. If there is no connection, there is no relationship and no fruit.

It make sense to prune *dead* or diseased limbs. It seems contradictory that to cause more and healthy

growth in plants, some of the *healthy* parts must be trimmed. But the wrong kind of growth can damage the vine, cutting off sunlight and allowing moisture that causes mold and infections. Then the *whole* vine is in trouble. Growth in the *wrong* direction is *not* good growth.

Concl. This applies to our lives as well. A few of our habits could probably use a little pruning. It might hurt a little but later we are often healthier. Sometimes our relationships could use a little pruning. Harsh words and actions or old hurts and resentments need to be trimmed away. Some *new* connections need to be grafted on. The vital nourishment of being connected, part of a family or community is vital to new life. Technology can encourage *virtual* relationships. We often don't really know who we are connected to or the harm

that is done to our ability to sustain *real* relationships. I think we are seeing some of the results recently. It is also difficult to sustain our relationship with the Lord with occasional bursts of text or Instagram-like messages. The farther away from the life-giving roots of the Lord we get – less prayer, less worship, less scripture - the less nourishment for our spiritual and physical lives. Like most, strong relationships, “face time” with God is usually better. That kind is found on an old device called the heart.