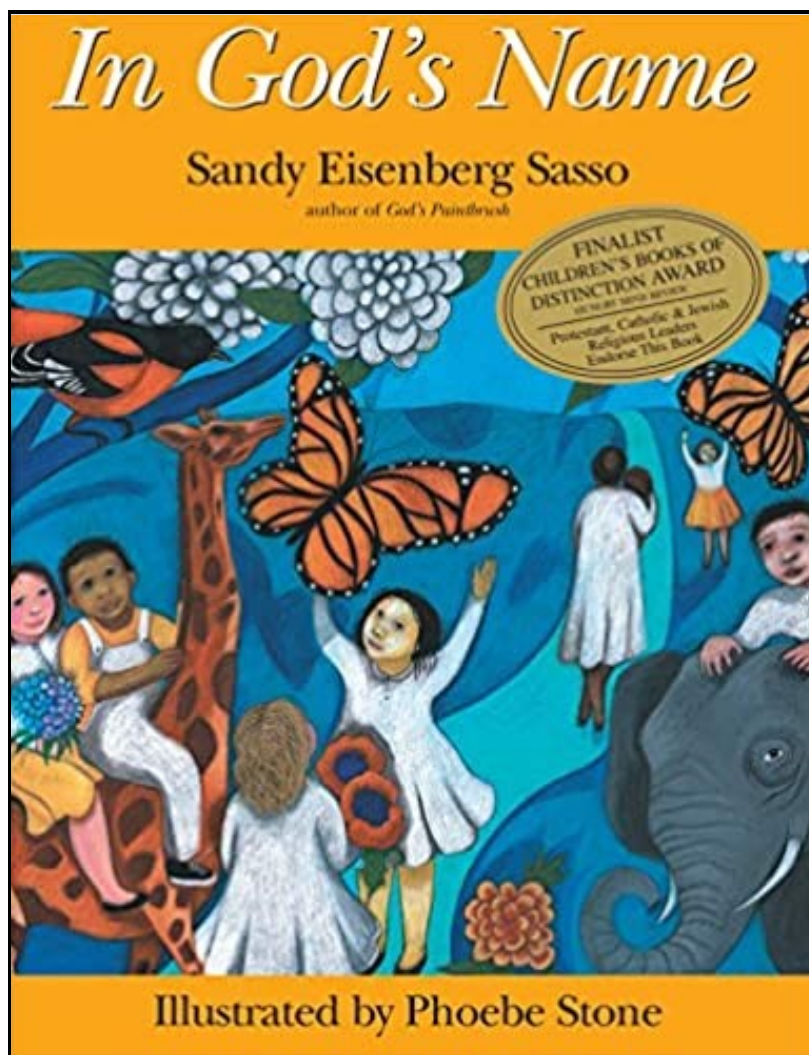


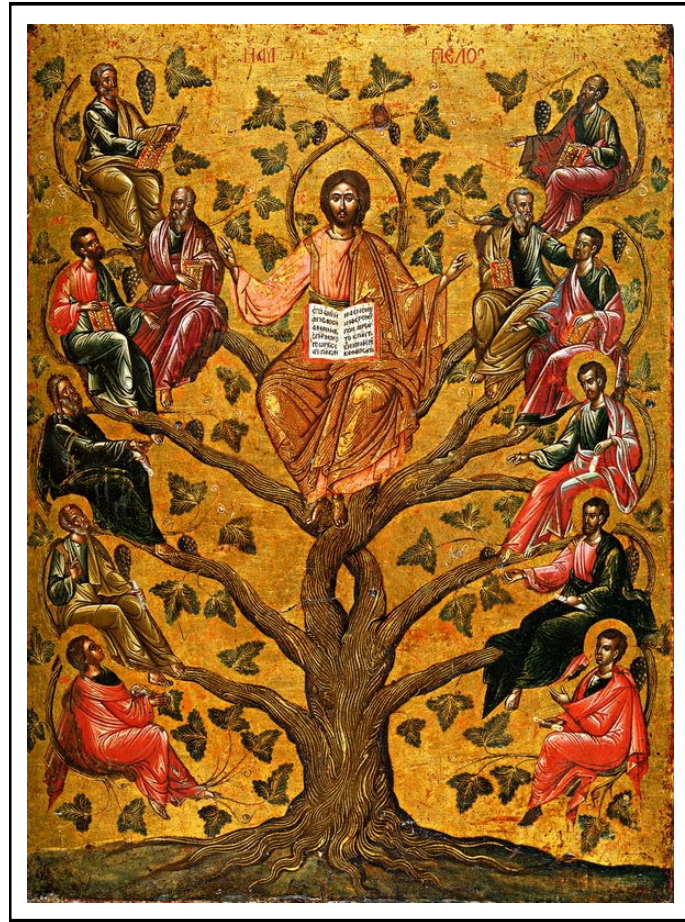
Living Grace

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
CYCLE B

"SEEING GOD IN ALL & SEEING GOD IN US!"



*In poetic text and vibrant illustrations, **In God's Name** is a modern fable celebrating the diversity and, at the same time, the unity of all people. "God must have a single name this greater and more powerful than all other names." All the people of the world set out to find God's name...and each of the many seekers is sure that he or she alone has found the right name, the only name, for God. Finally, they come together - and at last learn what God's name really is.*



CHRIST THE TRUE VINE

*Icon painting by unknown artist ~ 16th Century
Byzantine Museum ~ Athens, Greece*

EXPLORING THE ART:

The renowned 15th century Cretan iconographer Angelos Akotantos painted the icon *Christ the Vine* during a pivotal and turbulent period of the Church's history. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire was imminent, leading to a contentious Church council where leaders strove to unify the Eastern and Western Church. Today, the original icon is sequestered in a Cretan monastery, but like all icons, many versions exist, including this one in the Byzantine Museum in Athens.

Christ with extended arms is seated at the center of the intertwined branches, establishing him as the common root and life of the Church. An open book, inscribed with excerpts from John 15 (this week's gospel), at the Christ figure, suggests the Word's centrality. St Peter and St Paul, perhaps representing the two branches of the Church, East and West are prominently positioned on either side of Christ. They are seated higher than the other apostles while the evangelists sit to Christ's immediate left and right, dialoguing in pairs. The remaining apostles, like Christ, hold open books and scrolls - their eyes fixed on him. The hanging fruit symbolizes the continuation of the faithful: as they abide in Christ so too he abides in them.

UNITY & CONNECTION

Living Grace

READ ALOUD STORY



"Abide in Me" by Vicki Shuck, Esperanza

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read aloud video link:

[IN GOD'S NAME](#)

Written by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso & Illustrated by Phoebe Stone

Sunday Gospel

JOHN 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.

He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.

You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.

Remain in me, as I remain in you.

Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own

unless it remains on the vine,

so neither can you unless you remain in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit,
because without me you can do nothing.

Anyone who does not remain in me

will be thrown out like a branch and wither;

people will gather them and throw them into a fire
and they will be burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.

By this is my Father glorified,

that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

ABUNDANT LIFE IS OFFERED TO ALL WHO ABIDE.

In our children's story people are seeking to name God, the life-giving energy that emanates all of creation. They experience God through their vocations and in their families and in their everyday lives. They name God as healer, mother, father, shepherd, friend. It is a human need to search for God. Many theologians pose that our need for God is proof of God itself. This yearning crosses all cultures, languages, time periods, historical events, race, and creed. We all share in this oneness, and we search to name what it is. In this gospel, Jesus takes this yearning a step further. Jesus says that he is the vine and his Father is the vine grower. He tells us that yes, it is God who is the life-giving energy we see all around us that makes things grow. Our goal is to glorify God by becoming what we were created to be. God is action, alive, energy, movement, grace, growth. All of these descriptions are action words. If God is active it means he is alive in our lives, alive in us.

Jesus says, "By this my Father was glorified that you bear much fruit." What might it mean to bear fruit? It has to be God who does the growing. It would take more faith to believe it could be anything else. What else could not only create the design of creation filled with life, rhythm, and balance, but also infuse life every day. What makes the sun rise and things grow? What is able to change, transform, and bear fruit? Fruits and vegetables feed and nourish us. What a system! It truly must be divine, as it is so far beyond the scope of anything we could imagine on our own.

Jesus tell us that we are made for fruitful lives - lives that develop of our gifts and talents, and offer them to God in our vocational work and through growing families and communities of love. Love and grace fuel the growth, and the gospel writers tell us, God who is love. It is an amazing invitation to life, growth, love, and grace that is offered to us every day. God's great design meets our needs through the earth that grows food to sustain us - a constant reminder of our reliance on God. Jesus says he is the vine and his Father is the vine grower. He tells us that the secret to bearing fruit is to "remain in me as I remain in you". If you remain in me, you will bear much fruit. Jesus shares with his disciples the path to glorify God is this stance, to "be in", to be able to bear fruit. Remain in him, as he is in God.

Take a minute and look all around, close your eyes and imagine all the gifts God has brought into your life. See the grace, the growth, and the fruit - see God. Jesus is taking all of creation and human understanding to a new level. All of us experience differing aspects of God, just like the people in our children's story. Not only can God be seen all around us as the people in the story proclaim, but Jesus tells us that God is also in US! We are in the Father through Jesus. Take time to be still, and feel the life of God in you. Can you feel it, open up, and let it out? That is how we grow fruit and glorify God.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What names do you call God by? What are some of the names that others might call God by, and why? What does God provide for us? What would happen if one year the crops did not grow and come to harvest? What would we eat? How would we be nourished? Do we have to depend on God for our very lives to continue? How physically not just spiritually? Have you seen a vineyard or a fruit tree? What happens if a branch gets cut off? Can it still grow fruit?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How did the people in the story come up with their names for God? Did so many different names cause a problem? How did they resolve this?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What are the instructions that Jesus gives us so that we will bear fruit? What do you think that means? What are ways that we might remain in God? What things can we do, as Jesus describes, to remain fruit bearing? What does Jesus say will be the results?

Jesus tells us that not only can God be seen all around us, but God is also in US! God is the life-giving energy we see all around us that makes things grow. God is active - alive, energy, movement, grace, growth. All of these descriptions are action words. If God is active it means he is alive in our lives, alive in us. We are made for fruitful lives - lives that develop of our gifts and talents, which we offer back to God. We glorify God by becoming all that he created us to be.

Biblical Background

JOHN 15:1-8

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus and the disciples have exited the Upper Room and are making their way across the city. They will cross a great archway that will lead them onto the Temple Mount. The intent of Jesus is to pass through this great public space, pausing to reflect on the vine and branches motif that had been expertly carved into the lintel of the great Temple doors. From this location they make an exit off the Temple Mount through the Golden Gate. This route would take them along the Kidron Valley into the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus will rest and pray in anticipation of the arrival of Judas with the intent of arresting Jesus. The carving of idolatrous images is strictly forbidden in Jewish law. It was allowed, however, to depict in an artistic manner any part of God's creation; both flora and fauna as well as carved sacred images to the practice of your religion (The Ark of the Covenant, etc). The vine and branches carved into the lintel of the Temple door are a central motif in Jewish life depicting God as the source of all.

TERMS: *Disciple* A disciple is a student of a teacher who is known as a Rabbi. The Rabbi/Student relationship was of paramount importance in the time of Jesus. Jesus was unique in the fact that he invited both men and women, among those he called into membership into his discipleship group. This was quite radical for the time period but certain to be true nonetheless.

Clean/pruned The keeper of the vines has a responsibility to cut back the dead branches on the vines in anticipation of new growth in the spring. Done properly the vine will return growth, and subsequent fruit, in abundance with each successive growing season. It is the teaching of Jesus that symbolically prunes the disciples in preparation for their exponential growth when they will "bear much fruit". This pruning is a required part of being a disciple.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The cultural assumption of this gospel is that Jesus would have expected the disciples to connect the carved motif and his teaching with Isaiah 5:1-8. The vine and branches is an ancient motif for the Jewish people at this time. It reaches back to the Prophet Isaiah and the vision of God planting a vineyard on a hill that God will tend and care for and will eventually call Israel. After all the careful work of planting and tending the vines, God is distraught because, when he came looking for a crop of good grapes, it yielded only bad fruit. This mirrors Jesus' attitude toward the Temple religious leadership in charge of the sacrificial system. They should be producing good fruit but they are not. It will be up to the disciples to bring glory to the Father by bearing fruit through their ministry; fruit that will last.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: In Isaiah chapter five the prophet writes a "song" about the people Israel, a people that God loves. Isaiah 5:7 reminds the community that, "The Vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel". They are the branches that have grown from the original vine that was planted by God. In the Gospel, Jesus identifies himself as co-equal with his Father. Jesus says that he is the "true vine" and that his Father is the "gardener" referring back to the passage in Isaiah 5. Jesus has been sent by God to reveal his Father to the disciples. Jesus is revealing the Father to the disciples as Middle Eastern Patron. In the Middle East those who have power (Patrons) are expected to use it to serve others in a generous manner. There is no expectation of payment for the blessings they receive. The client is expected to honor the Patron with praise and thanksgiving. It is the Patron's good pleasure to bless the clients in this way.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: What do all of these people discover is the way to name God? How do you as a family name God? What might we do as a family to be fruitful and glorify God?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: UNITY
GROWTH

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: As a family visit a farm or an orchard. What can you learn about God from the way things grow? Based on what you learn, what does that teach us about our spiritual lives? Do we have a lot in common with all of creation in regard to being fruitful? Make a list about what you learn from this on staying nourished and connected to God and each other. Make some new commitments as to how you feel called to grow spiritually as a family.