

**The Fifth Sunday of Easter • May 10, 2009**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

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John 15:1-8

"Connected"

**We are a *connected* people**, living in a connected world. Rather than going to a research library to look up information from a scholarly journal, you need only sit down at a computer to access volumes upon volumes of archived publications. If you want to see a movie, you don't have to go out to a theater when you can have a DVD mailed to your home – you might even have the film beamed directly to your television through on-demand or streaming video services. Instead of mailing letters to a friend on the other side of the country, you might simply send an e-card or dial them on your handheld wireless device. These days, we have the ability to do things that were once only imagined in stories. We are a connected people.

One of the things that most surprised me on my trip to Haiti last week was the widespread availability and usage of mobile phones. Even in this, one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere, I observed that many adults had their own cell phones. Throughout Port-au-Prince, you could see vendors standing around, wearing the uniform vest of one of the national mobile companies and carrying a device that would allow people to buy more minutes of talk time for their phones. With their mobile phones, the people there could be connected. **Think about what these devices have made possible – their capabilities are simply amazing.** In Haiti, and here in the States, people use cell phones to make plans with friends or call home to see what they need to pick up and bring home for dinner. We are a connected people. More and more people are using mobile phones to send text messages to each other, an even more instant kind of messaging than e-mail. Depending on your device and wireless provider, you might be especially connected, able to check the news, weather, or sports scores from anywhere you go.

But these devices are ultimately only as good as their connection. Who'd want a mobile phone that can't make calls? It pretty much defeats their purpose! Wireless companies boast about the size and coverage of their networks in their ad campaigns, saying that "it's all about the network," that you'll get more bars (better signal strength) in more places, that you won't have "dead zones" where you lose your connection. And one of the complaints that people often voice when they're unhappy with a wireless provider is the frequency of "dropped calls," phone connections that cut out mid-conversation. If the device isn't able to keep a connection to the network, or if the network isn't sufficiently widespread or powerful enough to sustain a link to its phones, then there's not much of a reason for keeping them. **Apart from its network, a mobile device loses its primary reason for being.** It can't do what it's supposed to do: it's functionally dead. Cell phones that don't connect need to get carted off for recycling.

Do we need to be recycled? Or, to use the language that Jesus uses in our text today from John 15, are we fruitless branches that should be thrown into the fire and burned? If we have dropped our call, the call to abide, to remain, in Jesus, then that is the fate that would await us. **When we neglect our connection with God in Jesus, we lose our primary purpose for being.** Without Jesus, we can't do the good things for which we were intended in life. We can't act in love and service if we've abandoned our relationship with Christ, who is the embodiment of love and service. **Like the out-of-service cell phone, we need a connection.** We were made to be in communication with something bigger than ourselves, with some *One*. We are not designed to be self-sufficient, independent units that are separate from the supreme service provider. Yet that is exactly the attitude that we embrace when we neglect our connection with Jesus. We might make plans for the tasks of the day, but we fail to set aside even a portion of that day to spend in devotions and the

study of God's living Word. We might knock on wood, but we don't come to our Lord in prayer to ask for His guidance and wisdom in the enterprises we undertake. We might faithfully go to the gym to workout or to the office to work, but we don't regularly go out into our community to serve the poor, homeless, or the hungry. We drop our call.

But God restores our connection. The Father sends His Son, the ultimate service technician, to repair the damage that our sin and neglect have done. On the cross, Jesus does what is necessary to remove the interference that had kept us from connecting with God. Through the tower of the cross, Jesus reconnects us with the Father. We are no longer alone, cut off, out-of-service. God can be with us, and we can be with Him. And God's coverage is more comprehensive than the most extensive wireless network: anywhere we go, He is there – there are no more dead zones. **Once again, we are a connected people.**

Jesus calls us to abide in him, to remain connected, and he makes this abiding possible. We can connect with God through His Word in the Bible. As we spend time with Him there, His Spirit strengthens our connection, getting to know Him all the more. Similarly, Jesus directs us to pray, to converse with our heavenly Father about every aspect of our lives. When we come to God in Jesus through these gifts He has given for our use, we become what we are meant to be as people who follow Jesus. **Connected, we can "bear fruit,"** we can live out God's love in acts of service and compassion.

This weekend, our nation celebrates Mother's Day, a time to honor and give thanks for our mothers, those who have been given the wonderful responsibility of nurturing and raising their children. Most mothers I have talked with have said that they would do whatever might be necessary to protect their children from harm – even to the extent of giving up their own life for their children. **Such selfless love is an echo of the love that God has for you,** the abiding love that we hear of in this text from John 15 and in our other readings this day. You might be planning to send – or, if you thought ahead, have already sent! – your mother a card, or flowers; maybe you'll be giving her a phone call or taking her out for a special meal. Mothers appreciate such things because these reflect your desire to be with them, to be in relationship. In an even deeper way, God wants to be connected with you.

**In Baptism, God signs the contract to be our service provider – connecting us, not for just one year or two, but forever.** He promises to abide *in* us. In the pouring-out of those baptismal waters, we experience God's forgiving, adopting love for us as His children. He welcomes us and brings us into a much larger network with the rest of His people in the Church. Here, He gives us other Christians, other people who are no longer solitary units but part of something bigger: part of the body of Christ. Together, as God's baptized people, we can accomplish great things, working in love and service to one another and to our community. We provide comfort in times of sadness, we call to repent in times of error, we rejoice in times of celebration, and we grow together in relationship with our Lord. The Holy Spirit imparts all these gifts and more, making it possible for us to abide in Christ as he abides in us. Amazing things can happen when you're connected!

**Through God's love in Jesus, we *are* a connected people.**

Amen.