

But Jesus also called himself, “the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.” Again, he must have meant that we are his sheep and, because of his great and unending love for us, he was willing to lay down his life so that we could be free, forgiven and in a loving relationship with God.

Sheep are not a common sight in most of our daily lives so the imagery that Jesus used so long ago seems a bit strange. Today, Jesus might have said, “I am the doorway” which we would all understand as something we must pass through to get into our house, our school, a store, our church – any place that we wanted to enter. Jesus is, indeed, our doorway into a loving and meaningful life with God.

INFORMAL TIME:

(At this time, if you wish, you may want to discuss the whole concept of gates and doorways and how we must pass through them to get to someplace that we want to be. This can lead to the way in which Jesus is our doorway into a relationship with God which is something that God wants for each of us.)

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God, we thank you for coming into our world as Jesus so that we would have a doorway direct to you. We know that through your Son, Jesus, we may experience a full, meaningful and abundant life and hope for eternal life with you. We trust in you, O God, to provide for our needs and to grant us the desires of our hearts as you have promised. Help us to focus our lives on the teachings of Jesus and on reaching out in love to other persons so that they, too, can go through the doorway to a loving relationship with you. **Amen**



I AM THE VINE

The Fourth Week of Lent

(The following segments can either all be read by one person or, better, the different segments can be read by different members of the family or group gathered together for the devotional.)

OPENING:

Last week, we talked about the strange phrase of Jesus, “I am the gate.” This week’s saying, for most of us, is also peculiar. Jesus said, “I am the vine.” For most of us, grapevines are just as strange as sheep. We don’t see

either sheep or grapevines very often. But, when Jesus went on to say that we are the branches of the vine and that God’s love flows through the vine and the branches to touch others, it all seems more clear.

SCRIPTURE READING:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (John 15.1, 5, 9-10, 12)

REFLECTION:

When we get grapes, they usually come in a plastic bag from the grocery store. However, those grapes grew on the branches of a vine. They grew from tiny seeds into the luscious fruits that we can buy and eat or that are squeezed to make grape juice or wine. And, while they were growing, the vine grower cared for them everyday to see that they got enough sunlight and water and fertilizer to make them grow just right.

Jesus said that he is a vine, we are the branches of the vine, those people with whom we share God’s love are the grapes or fruit of the vine, and God is the vine grower who cares for the vine, the branches and the fruit. And, if we follow this illustration to its conclusion, the Holy Spirit is God’s love that is the growing force flowing through the vine and branches to give life and growth to the fruit, the grapes.

Today, most of us are not directly involved in growing grapes so this illustration seems a bit foreign. But, the idea that somehow, the love and power of God comes through Jesus to each of us is certainly valid. And, the idea that our calling as believers in Jesus is to spread God’s love to each person that we meet is also true. When we produce fruit by loving others so much that they, too, become attached to Jesus, we have fulfilled our primary function as the branches of Jesus the vine.

INFORMAL TIME:

(At this time, if you wish, you may want to discuss this complicated illustration of the vine, the vine grower, the branches and the fruit by allowing everyone to express their feelings about what the illustration means to them.)

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God, we sing your praise. You have promised that we shall abide in you, and you in us, and that through expressions of your love to others, we will be fruitful. Help us so that our lives will show forth your love so that our hatred shall become love and our sorrow shall become joy. We pray that your Holy Spirit will always flow through Jesus, the True Vine, and into our hearts so that we can reach out and share your love with each person that we meet.

Amen