

**Branching Out in Faith**  
**John 15:1-8 - Earth Day**  
**Rev. Laurie Crelly**  
**East Church UCC, Grand Rapids MI**

I am proud of my family's heritage. The Busch family, my mother's family, was one of the founding families of greenhouse growers in Minneapolis. We have four generations of growers in our family. Because of this, I have always felt a particular connection to the earth, nature, and growing things. My grandfather Bernard, besides having a large greenhouse complex on the family land, also had a large garden, a small apple orchard, several rows of grape vines and raised chickens. The family compound was about five miles from us where my grandfather, great uncle Fred and my uncle Don all had houses on our little family street and together owned the greenhouse business. This place became a second home to our family where I ran around with my cousins. Together we explored the greenhouse, helped in the garden, collected eggs from the chicken coop and learned how to raise plants. These visits created a wonderful learning environment growing up. So, when I read the scriptures and the many parallels between our spiritual connections to God and our connections to the earth and agriculture I think of my family legacy as growers, going back generations.

Even though we eventually closed the greenhouse and sold the land to developers, the family legacy continues with my cousins about ten miles further out in Medina. Len Busch Roses has been passed down to my cousin Patrick and his children. Being a person of the land; a grower, a farmer, a rancher, is something you need to have deep in your bones and pass on to your children. Unfortunately, our industrialization of food

production is slowly separating people from this intimate relationship we should have with the land.

The wisdom and practices of raising abundant crops is a lifelong skill one develops. It is this kind of legacy that is part of the term “abide” we read in this morning’s Gospel. Jesus emphasizes the importance of abiding in him just as Jesus abides in God. This word in Greek has a variety of interpretations and is used eleven times in John chapter fifteen alone.

The Greek word *Meno*, often translated as “stay or abide”, can also mean to live, dwell; last, endure, continue, remain alive, and persevere. All these terms bring with it a sense of long-term commitment and steadfast dedication. There is an interdependent relationship and commitment to one another that is inherent in this concept of abiding. It is not a transactional relationship but a love and devotion that endures through both the good and bad times. It is easy to be committed to something when you are reaping the benefits and joys of harvest. But to stick with it in times of drought, poor harvest or even the long wait to see the fruits of your labor successfully pay off requires an abiding perseverance.

As we see in this passage, the vine grower may do things that seem harsh and counter intuitive for the plant, like cutting back or prune some of the branches so that more energy can go to building a root system, stopping disease, or redirecting energy to fruit production. Sometimes that is how life can feel. Is God cutting something unproductive off? Or is God pruning so that we can become stronger, better, and more fruitful?

Another aspect of gardening that also informs our faith is the need to be innovative and willing to try new things. The grower may work with new techniques to increase yields or reduce disease. Many growers will graft in new species to allow the best genetics of each plant come through to improve the overall results of new varieties that are designed for a climate, desired taste or is resistant to disease. This is not the work of the plant, but of the grower who has the bigger picture of what is needed or desired.

“One great example of this is the Honeycrisp Apple, the state fruit of Minnesota. This species of apple was first grafted by farmers in the 1960s. It was a cross between a Macoun and Honeygold apple. It took nearly another thirty years before it was for sale commercially. Back in 1977, there were only four Honeycrisp apple trees in existence – and they were almost thrown away because of a less than impressive harvest. Their original “parent” tree had died during the cold winter of 1974-75. Luckily, a University of Minnesota fruit breeder stepped in and saved these four apple trees from extinction, moving them to a more desirable growing location – and the apples took off!”<sup>1</sup>

The difference goes right down to a cellular level: When studied under an electron microscope, Honeycrisp cells are nearly double the size of cells in most other apples, which accounts for their unique texture, and distinctive crisp sound when eaten. It was also designed to thrive in colder northern climates like its home state of Minnesota.

This work of creating new species by cross pollinating or grafting in to create new hybrid varieties is also a concept applied in faith by Paul. In

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lundsandbyerlys.com/what-makes-honeycrisp-apples-so-different-back/>

Romans 11 Paul uses the metaphor of grafting to explain how gentiles are received into the church. He says this in Romans 11 starting in 17:

“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted among the others to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember: you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”

This work of grafting spiritually is how we branch out and adapt our faith to our environment and the changing times the church faces with each new generation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit we see in our other reading in Acts 8. It is also the work we see today in the ongoing ministries of the church around the world.

As a church and denomination, it is something we celebrate and watch for. As we like to say, “Don’t place a period, where God has placed a comma.” For we understand that God is always at work among us, especially with those who are open to God’s guidance. Jesus reminds us to abide in him. To remain connected and nourished by God’s word and grace.

When we fail to honor and cherish the interconnected web of life that we are part of, we will fail to care for it as God intended. Let our faith be like young tender leaves stretching toward the sun’s light and roots digging deep into the earth to drink of the waters of life. Let us learn from nature what it means for us to abide in Christ as Christ abides in God. For God is the Master Gardener. We may be able to count the number of seeds within an apple, but only God can count the number of apples within a single seed.