

Secure Connection

There was a knock on our front door. Both Eileen and I were enjoying our breakfast on this fine sunny Saturday morning.

Who could this be?

We were not expecting visitors, but upon opening the front door there were three of them, looking at me. The young lady carried a small child in her arms and a young boy was standing next to her. She introduced herself and we got to know our neighbour. Our properties, so we discovered, made contact at the back fence. They had recently moved into the area. Her face displayed sadness and the reason for this soon became apparent.

“My husband left early this morning for work,” she began. “But before leaving he noticed something in your garden and I’ve come to warn you, to prepare you for the vision you are about to encounter.”

There was a moment of silence. She was searching for the right words.

“We’ve noticed that you love your garden and your delightful chickens. Our little boy likes watching them when he comes home from school. We just know you love your chickens. That’s why I came so early. My husband noticed a fox in your garden this morning, around five-thirty. I’m sorry to have to tell you, but the fox has killed all your chickens. My husband was too late to save any of them.”

Both Eileen and I shed some tears that morning. Our girls, as we affectionately called them, lay indeed dead in our orchard and this sad incident was not due to a lack of a fox-proof house. In fact, I had built a very safe place for our girls and it was in perfect order.

These are the events that led to the drama. Our custard apple tree had grown to considerable height. Come late afternoon, our girls easily reached the low growing branches and then made their way upward, one branch at a time, until one day I couldn’t reach them anymore. And there they slept peacefully. However, chickens being early risers, the fox was waiting for them that morning.

Following this event I made a number changes. The custard apple tree was cut down and replaced with a dwarf fruit tree. This one would grow to a mere three metres in height. We also purchased more chickens, but from that day I made sure that the girls were safely locked in their protective chicken coop each afternoon.

The trees in our small orchard have now reached maturity. Fourteen fruit varieties can be found, such as oranges, mango, persimmon, blue berries, bananas and we also have a few grape-vines. I do love gardening and spend a considerable time in this delightful landscape. Today’s Bible

reading is very close to my heart, a bit like my garden. Let us visit these words again, written in the gospel of John, chapter 15, so many years ago.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit. I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned.”

None of us here has difficulties understanding what Jesus is saying to us, do we? It's plain and simple. However, today I would like to suggest to you an alternative solution. Perhaps it's all due to my love for the garden.

I am holding in my hand a bare piece of timber, about ten inches long. It has no roots and no leaves are attached. It is in fact a piece of a grape-vine that grows in my garden. With my sharp secateurs I've cut off this branch, just about an hour ago. This branch in my hand may promote an uneasy feeling now, especially when we consider today's reading of the Gospel of John. Here is that passage once again.

“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.”

As a gardener I am well aware of another possibility for this branch. Death is not necessarily the only result. In fact, if I was to push this ten inch piece of vine into fertile soil, this small piece of bare timber would in time develop roots, followed by shoots of lush green leaves and in time become a vine, capable of bearing much good fruit.

I suggest to you that this principle can be confirmed when we examine the church. Ask yourself...How did the Primary School come into being?

Was it not established by a group of Grace church parishioners, who believed that God was calling them to build a school across the road?

Thus a new grape-vine was created, by God, the expert gardener. All this is only possible because of Jesus. This branch in my hand cannot become a vine unless it is alive, in the case of a new Christian school, alive in Christ. Lutheran schools are God's grape-vines on this planet, bearing much good fruit. The same can be said when we consider the establishment of the Grace Crèche and Kindergarten, the Grace Lutheran College and the establishment of Bayside Community Care, some twenty-seven years ago. This branch in my hand contains all the vital elements of the vine it came from.

Let us examine this principle again, but this time on the small personal scale. Twenty-five years ago I felt just like this bare piece of timber, disconnected from the world due to a divorce, the loss of my family, my home and most of my friends. But two years prior, Jesus became my personal Saviour and Lord and God, the expert gardener, knew exactly what He was doing. God pushed this small bare piece of vine into the ground in Sandgate. I have lived there ever since, growing in the knowledge of God and being blessed full measure.

Sometimes, in our journey with Jesus, you and I, we may feel a bit like this bare branch, disconnected and perhaps lonely.

Where are you God?

There may be circumstances that may promote this kind of feeling. Perhaps it is old age; perhaps it is ill health that has placed a person into a lonely place. Many elderly in an aged-care facility or at home, has raised this question.

Where are you God?

For some people it may be the loss of a life partner or a secure workplace position. Some may experience loneliness as a result of their children having left the home. In our journey through life we are at times exposed to situations that may have led us to believe that we are cut off.

Where are you God?

There are two “f...” words that are frequently mixed up when seeking an answer to this question.

These two words are “Feelings” and “Faith.”

Jesus did not say...“your feelings have made you well,” and yet so many people rely on their feelings.

Instead, Jesus said to a number of people and Jesus continues to speak these words to you today.... “Your FAITH has made you well.”

Human beings are so prone to rely on their feelings. Mind you, God has provided us with this comprehensive set of feelings for a good reason, because these can indeed bless us richly. But ultimately it is faith that makes you well. Faith can make you well when your feelings want to take you on a dangerous trip or like turbulent emotional waves try to make you sea-sick.

The branch I am holding in my hand contains the life of the vine from which it came. It is not dead. It is alive, just as you and I are alive, because we are strongly connected to God. It is Jesus, the vine, who connects you and me to God.

Here are some valuable reminders of this incredible connection we enjoy. You are baptised in His Holy name. You are the recipient of the precious gift of the Holy Spirit. There is more to celebrate, namely Holy Communion and of course, the precious Word of God.

In the Word of God we can discover and re-discover for ourselves just how much God loves us. Within the Word of God is contained a rich blessing for you and me, if we enter into it, like entering a beautiful garden. Here we can see what is important to God, our gardener. Perhaps that's why Saint Paul encourages us to be *"transformed inwardly by the complete change of our mind."*

I'm a great believer in scripture memory. If a certain Bible verse appeals to me, I will write on a piece of paper and read it three times daily, until it sticks. After a week the verse will have produced roots in my mind, just like this branch. No matter where I go, the Bible verse I committed to memory, will accompany me, growing in prominence and providing much spiritual nutrients.

Jesus once said...*"I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you."*

(John 14:18)

In Psalm 91 we can read these precious words...*"God's faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."*

I encourage you to memorize these two Bible verses during the next week, because just like our chickens, you and I, we also have an enemy who *"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"*, Saint Peter warns us.

God has provided us with a secure home here on earth whilst we dwell on this planet. It is of course, His church. It is Jesus, the Head of the church, who won the victory for us on the cross over our sins. It is Jesus, the true vine, who connects you and me to God, our gardener, our creator and Father in heaven, and *"nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus"*, our Saviour and Lord.

May the peace of God which transcends all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Amen