



Fifth Sunday of Easter
28 April 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I am a big fan, huge fan of the digital gas gauge in my car. Not just a dial but the exact number of miles you can travel on the gas inside of your vehicle. Whoever came up with the device is a genius. In the old days – like 2013 - a little light would come on when your gas tank ran low, and you would have to guess how many miles you could still drive before you ran out of gas. Now you can drive your car down to the very last mile and coast into the gas station to fill up without a care in the world, almost. A couple of weeks ago, I watched my gas gauge count down the miles. 46 on Tuesday. 32 on Wednesday. 19 on Thursday. 3 on Friday. I knew I would have to get gas on Saturday. The gas station is 2.2 miles from my house. Saturday morning, just after 8, I climbed into my van to run to the gas station. When I turned on the car. The gas gauge said 2 miles. And by the time I left my subdivision I was down to 1 mile of gas. I started to sweat. I drove back home and poured gas into my gas tank from my extra gas can. When I turned on the car – the extra gas only gave me one extra mile. So, now I am really sweating. When I ran out of gas, who would come to my rescue. My wife, who was still asleep? Certainly not! My dad, who warned me about letting my gas tank get so low – even though I remembered plenty of conversations between my mom and dad when my mom asked why my dad let the gas tank get so low. Only if he was not already out to breakfast somewhere. Pastor Tony – buddy, the walk will do you good, he might say! So, I drove to the gas station, slowly coasting through stop signs and intersections – because, if I stopped, I was sure I would run out of gas. When the gas tank hit zero – I was done. Well, that’s it! I thought to myself. Still 8 blocks away from the promised land. I thought I was finished. But the van kept going. What is this magic? It is a miracle! Like water into wine – somehow, my van was turning vapor into gasoline – and still I kept driving. I smiled all the way to the Kwik Trip. I pulled in and began to celebrate. All was not lost. Even as the gas gauge read zero miles left until empty. The Lord had provided. It was only after telling the miraculous story to my father that he explained that most cars will still drive a good number of miles before they run out of gas. Now the question is, “should I test that theory out?” But the question remains, who would come to my aid then?

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. I find it amusing that most of us can quote the first part of the verse, but often forget the second half. Jesus tells his disciples that he is the vine, and they are the branches. It makes perfect sense. That we live this life at its fullest when we are connected to the vine. In the Bible there are countless examples. Jesus is the bread of life. We eat the bread of life. Jesus is the living water. We drink this living water. Jesus is the good shepherd. We are the sheep of his pasture. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We can only get to the Father through Jesus. Jesus is the door. We are the ones who knock at the door. Jesus is the light of the world. We walk in darkness until we follow Jesus. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. I am the vine, we are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. And yet we try. Again and again, we try. Sometimes we even do okay for ourselves. We drive the car until the gas gauge says zero miles left and still, we keep driving. And by the grace of God, and someone’s smart planning, the car keeps going. A miracle? Probably not. And yet, it feels like a reprieve. A moment of grace. I will take it. Except, then I want another. And another. In my world, it turns out, I



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can keep driving long past zero. And I do. And then somewhere along the way it all catches up. For me, it was covid last week. A body in need of rest, trying to do it all, ignoring the concerns of my wife – because I have to keep going – until, well, I cannot. And not only did my body need a few days rest – but it turns out so did my soul. I am the vine, you are the branches – apart from me you can do nothing. It turns out I needed the reminder. And so, to maybe do you.

I went to my daughter's soccer game on Friday evening. The wind howled. The rain came down in sheets. I stood on the sideline watching a JV team from Menomonee Falls complete with a JV team in blue and white jerseys. I cheered when the white jersey scored. I cheered when the white jersey blocked a goal kick. I cheered when the white jersey made a breakaway with the ball. And then I texted my wife. What number is Anna again? I was having trouble finding her on the field and according to my wife – the coach never takes Anna out of the game. My wife texted back #21. I searched the white jerseys until I found 21 running down the field. She had black hair. Ummmmm, not my daughter. When the ball came towards the sidelines, I looked at the front of the white jerseys only to find it was not Waukesha West but New Berlin West. I had been cheering for the wrong team, shouting at Anna to “pressure” and “get in there,” when #21 was clearly not Anna. I slowly backed away from the sidelines and a parent said, “is your daughter on this team?” Hmmmm, how to proceed? I decided to be honest. “No, I just asked my wife and apparently I am cheering for the wrong team – I thought this was Waukesha West.” But this was not Waukesha West and there was no Anna on this team. I slowly moved away to walk to the other field. When I came to the other field, there were black jerseys and white jerseys. And this time before cheering, I checked to see if #21 was on the field – and she was – did #21 have blonde hair – and she did! And then I heard another parent yell, “Go West!” And I knew I had found my people, my vine, at least for the soccer game. I am the vine; you are the branches, apart from me you can do nothing.

As much as I am a huge fan of the gas gauge that counts down your miles, I dislike just as much being apart or disconnected from the world. When my wife came home from a weekend away and found out I had covid, she banished me to the bedroom. Alone. Cut off. Disconnected unless I wore a mask and then only to come down the stairs for food and coffee and then back to my quarantine. In my banishment, neither Facebook, nor Netflix, nor Instagram, nor TikTok could provide the feeling of being connected to others. However, I found more time to pray – more time to read my devotions and a mystery I should have finished long ago. It turns out that my quarantine provided time to reconnect to the vine and enjoy a reset for myself as well. The Sunday, after Kathy Hahn died, her husband Jim was in worship. “I am glad to see you, Jim. It is good that you are here,” I said. “Where else would I be?” Jim said. I am grateful too for the reminder Jim offered. The branches need the vine – not only to drink deeply, knock on the door, walk in the light, or eat the bread of life but also to be reminded that we are not alone in the world – even as we might find ourselves saying goodbye to someone, we love more than all others – we are not alone. The vine grows the branches. The branches can provide for each other – cover, support, strength, and nourishment. We are not alone. God has been providing all along. We only need lean on one another until we are ready to grow once again. Thanks be to God! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.