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## *Abide in the Vine*

**A sermon by Ms. Hannah Kelly**  
**Easter 5 – Year B**

I was lying in bed at 9 o'clock on Sunday night. I was just sitting there with my calculus homework in my lap, feeling totally unprepared for the test Monday morning and wishing I could go to sleep and forget about it all. Have you ever had that melancholy feeling of dread on a Sunday night? When you realize the calm of Sunday is over and Monday is coming all too quickly? Wouldn't it be great if the weekend were just a little bit longer?

Instead of turning to the homework, I stared at the ceiling, and tried to negotiate with God for some extra time. God,—I said—if you could just stop time for one hour, I promise I will never go on Facebook again. God, if I could have just one more hour in the day, I would take shorter showers, not check my phone as much, and run faster during cross country practice. God, imagine how much more I could do with 25 hours in a day! I would wake up earlier and get to work right away!

As I thought more and more about what I would give up for this divine favor, though, I realized I could give the extra hour to myself if I pruned the branches in my life that don't bear fruit. If I limited going on Facebook to once a day, took a ten-minute shower, and didn't use my phone during the school day, I would have that additional hour.

Today's gospel reminds us of the importance of removing branches that bear no fruit. This doesn't mean to eliminate everything from your day that isn't directly productive. It doesn't tell us to remove the fun from our lives, but we are called to examine what does and what does not bear fruit.

Yes, I prefer scrolling through Facebook for five minutes to working on a Latin translation (can you blame me?). Those five minutes don't seem like anything in the moment, but if you add that time up over the day, it ends up being more significant than you think. Wouldn't you trade your fourth visit to Facebook in a day for a few extra minutes talking to your family over dinner? If you didn't spend so much time on Instagram, Twitter, or texting, wouldn't you have time to write a letter to an old friend, read another book, or pick up a new hobby?

Today's gospel uses the image of pruning branches that do not bear fruit. On one hand, this passage calls us to look at the moments in our lives that need to be pruned. It reminds us of all those things we can cut out in order to bear more fruit. But there is more—this gospel passage not only invites us to prune, it also asks us to look at the ways in which we are rooted in the vine. It calls us to look at the places in our lives where God fills us with life and passion. Those are the places where we abide in and connect with God.

I am passionate about running. I run cross country and track for my school, and go for a run nearly every day. You might even see me running along Peachtree after this service! We all know that running already brings the benefit of increased health and fitness, but like many of you, running is a time where I encounter God. Running is a time when I abide in God. When I'm out on the trails along the Chattahoochee River, I can feel God's presence in nature. When I'm running, I connect with God in a way that I don't experience in church. This probably isn't the right place to say that ... sorry Wallace. I run for many reasons, but I find that running is a way for me to be grounded in God. Running is a way for me to draw nourishment from the vine and abide in God.

As Senior Acolyte Captain, I connect with God when I am acolyting on Sunday mornings. Carrying the world's heaviest

processional cross, herding around 100 young acolytes, and working with vergers who change things at a moment's notice does have its challenges! Even with the occasional chaos, serving as an acolyte has brought me closer to the church and has been a great experience in leadership. I acolyte because it brings me joy. It makes me smile, and others smile. And when I see their smiles, I feel God's presence. Serving as an acolyte has provided me with a community I love, and people who are ready to teach God's word. I absolutely feel God's presence in the church.

For me, running and acolyting are two places where I connect with God. They are places where I abide in the vine. Jesus says, "Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches." The vine is what nourishes the branches.

If you're struggling to find meaning in what you do, look and see if you can trace it back to the vine. If you are passionate about something, chances are you can trace it back to the vine. If it does not lead to a love for God—or for any person—question it. Do you feel fulfilled by it or are you letting time slip by?

If I've learned anything in my senior year, it's that time is limited. I have a bright future ahead and I'm excited to start the next chapter of my life, but I couldn't help but feel sad during my last day of school on Friday. In the blink of an eye, my high school experience ended. But with this ending comes a new beginning, and the chance to re-examine how I abide in the vine. It is the perfect time to prune the branches in my life that do not bear fruit, and to nourish the branches that do bear fruit. As the school year winds down and everything comes to a close, I hope that you will do the same. Find the ways you are rooted in the vine, find ways to connect with God. This strong foundation will guide you through new beginnings. It will bring you peace and joy. This connection will nourish you, support you, and fulfill you.

Amen.