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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:4).

Acts 15:1-6; John 15:1-8

The metaphor of the vine and the branches emphasizes the intimate union we have with Christ because of baptism, which makes us members of his body. He is the source of our life, and only if we remain in him can we be fruitful. The imagery also includes the idea of pruning away branches that are nonproductive to enhance more productive ones. Rose cultivators will prune to concentrate on the most perfect rose.

Jesus also speaks in the discourses about “consecrating” his disciples for service. They are set aside to make them sacred, dedicated and focused. This reminds us of our own need to focus our energy on what is most important. An intimate relationship, whether with God or in friendship or marriage, requires deliberate time and attention to deepen and flourish. The decision to commit means setting aside other options to choose this person, this vocation. As many cohabitating couples can attest, failure to commit in order to keep other options open can deprive a relationship of the will that was needed to make it succeed.

We have rediscovered the word “quarantine” in this time of the pandemic, a word linked to the number 40, as in Lent or the period when the great flood purified the earth for 40 days and nights to isolate and restart a consecrated future contained in the Ark. This ancient story has taken on new meaning for a world thrust into an

enforced and unwanted retreat from normal activities by threat of contagion. We await signs that the flood will end so we can exit the ark to resume our lives.

It is hard to speak of any benefits coming from something that has cost so many lives and disrupted the freedom and livelihoods of millions of people. Yet, this crisis has exposed our interdependency and responsibility for one another and challenged us to acknowledge the reality that “we are all in this together.” How we respond will determine our survival and shape the world that emerges from this difficult time.

Jesus reassures us that he is with us and that nothing the Father has entrusted to him will be lost. If we remain in him and his words remain in us, anything we ask will be granted. Consecrated for now, we will look back and see that this difficult time has been fruitful in ways we could not have imagined.

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