

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY MAY 2, 2021

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Hillbilly Wine"

Based on John 5:1-8

Several lifetimes ago, I owned a majestic limestone historical home along the Trent River of southern Ontario. She was a quiet, grand matriarch of the riverfront, having served as an inn in the early days of settlement in the area. But for as grand and as beautiful as she was, she was a money pit for upgrading. Nothing fit or matched current construction, plumbing or electrical standards. Which made day to day living a nightmare. She did however, have an earthen floor root cellar, which I discovered, was the perfect place to make wine.

Now about the time I purchased this home was about the same time that the Brew-By-You stores were popping up in communities and wine kits were all the rage for the wine connoisseur wanna-be's, wishing to impress their great expertise of wine making upon their friends. So, while dinner parties were filled with conversations about tannins, and yeast blends, yours truly was gaining her knowledge of wine making from tattered and torn recipe books from the pioneer days, where I

discovered that our forefathers and mothers had managed to become quite accomplished at the task, without the help of the local Brew-By-You. The honest answer here is, that I was just too cheap to pay for the wine kit.

At the risk of sending Larry Davidson and Fred Wisse into shock and horror, here is what I have learned about wine making...

Rule # 1 - Always use fresh grapes, carefully washed, not too ripe, with stems and leaves removed

But fresh grapes from the store are expensive. And grapes grown at home are small. Wild grapes are even smaller, and require climbing along fence rows and battling Deer Flies. They are however, free! (and make an amazing deep red wine similar to a Merlot). My best score was becoming friends with a local Pick-Your-Own-Fruit market gardener, who would call me up at the end of each season of fruit, to pick up the mush that was left in the bottom of the large containers. The overripe mess was more pulp than fruit, filled with the leaves and twigs and the dust of sitting for a few days. And that mush resulted in the best tasting wines I've ever had.

Rule # 2 - Be sure to use quality sugar, the proper yeast and sterilized water

Ahhh, back to the cheap thing again. So, what was in the pantry that day? White baking sugar and bread yeast. That'll do! Add some hot tap water, give it a stir with a clean broom handle, and settle it down into the root cellar for a while. (I did say this was Hillbilly wine!)

Rule # 3 - Follow the instructions and timing of the kit precisely

Well, life gets busy doesn't it? Time continued on its merry way, and when time allowed, I played with the wine. When the carboy started to look pretty and tasted just as pretty, it was time to bottle.

Each batch was different. Some was decent. Some was good.

A few were outstanding.

The odd batch would even turn itself into sparkling wine all by itself. People would try to explain to me the reasons why this happened from time to time, about chemical equations, atmospheric pressure, sugar content, and so forth when I made the mistake of attending one of those 'high brow' dinner parties I mentioned before. But to be honest again,

I didn't really care how it happened, or why it happened. I just so enjoyed the surprise when it did happen.

Those who take their wine seriously will have no use for my silly stories. And that's fine. My point is this. It's not just the vine and the branches that are connected. It's everything else in the garden as well: the soil, the air, the sunlight, the weather that year, the amount of rainfall, the other things growing nearby, the bees, and the gardener's care through the season.

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
(v1)*

The vine needs the branches to grow and thrive, to reach for the sun and gather the moisture from the rain. And the branches need the roots of the vine to stabilize them, provide them nourishment from the soil, and keep the branch alive during drouth or winter seasons.

But the gardener does not just tend the vine and prune the branches.

The gardener tends the whole garden, tills the soil, protects the crop from birds, and wraps the vines in burlap in the winter.

The gardener looks at all the fruit, both luscious and firm, and mushy and overripe, and sets his or her creative

mind in motion to make the most of the bounty of the season.

The gardener appreciates not just the perfect fruit that looks like it should be on the cover of "Better Homes & Gardens", but marvels at the wonder of creation, and the miracle of fruit and vegetables that take shape from tiny seeds planted with care.

This is our Good News.

Our Gardener cares for each and every one of us with the tenderest of thought and touch, and delights as we grow and blossom into the men and women He designed us to be.

Our Gardener does not ask for us to be perfect fruit, but just to be who we are to be, in whatever shape we are to be in.

Our Gardener does not ask for perfect weather conditions, but tends the garden as life moves us this way and that.

Our Gardener anticipates that not every row of seeds will grow according to plan, and while He may be disappointed for a moment, He never gives up on what the crop might become, or how the crop might be used.

Our Gardener does not want our outcome to be predictable, similar to each other, or common; but delights in being surprised in us, like a sparkling wine from mushy fruit.

All our Gardener asks, is that we stay connected with Him, like the branches to do the vine. When we lose sight of Him, it is like our lives wither, our sparkle fades, and our leaves turn brown. We are of no use to Him, and of no use to others or ourselves. And so our Gardener asks only that we, in some way, remain connected with Him at all times:

So that we may grow,
So that we may thrive,
So that we may bear fruit.
For Him,
For ourselves,
For the church,
For the community,
For the faith.

Perfect fruit can make perfect wine.

Mushy fruit can make perfect wine too.

It matters not so much what you start with, but what you become, with the tender care and attention of the Gardener.

Let Him tend your roots, trim your branches, and enjoy the fruit of His labours.

May you care for someone in the same manner that the Gardener cares for you, so that they may stretch their branches, that they may cling to the roots of faith, that they may also, blossom and bloom to His glory.

Amen.