

September 2, 2018  
**Are You Connected?**  
John 15:1-8  
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Connection is very important for all of us. We are living with various connections. From our relationship with people, such as family, friends, and neighbors, to our technology, such as telephone, TV, and internet, we cannot live without connections. We were connected to our mothers in their wombs, before we were born into this world. Finally, sooner or later we will be connected with our creator in heaven by our death.

In Korean society, there are three main connections. 1) Blood connection: Family and relatives have strong connections, caring and supporting each other. 2) Geographic connection: When most Korean people meet a new person, they ask about his or her home town. If they realize he or she is from the same home town, they get closer and become more supportive than others. 3) School connection: They have special concerns and connections with their alumni or alumnae. Our mission trip to Korea next year is possible because I could connect with my pastor friends who graduated from the same seminary.

These connections bring Korean society collective egoism in almost every field of society such as in politics, economy, art, service, and even religion. There is support, forgiveness, understanding, and patience among those who are in the connection. But, if there are no connections, they are not willing to support, forgive, understand, and be patient. I heard that American society also has those kinds of connections, so-called old-boys network.

Today, we have new connections through the internet, especially through social networks such as Facebook, Snap Chat, and Twitter, as well as through email and websites. We call those who use the internet and communicate by it as netizens. The netizens are connected with each other beyond geographical borders of the countries and getting more influence in our society.

These internet connections have a powerful influence on today's society. Connections are getting more important in our lives. One of our Methodist traditions is "connectionalism." Faith Church is connected with other United Methodist churches in the Aurora District under the leadership of a superintendent; in the Northern Illinois Conference under the leadership of Bishop Sally Dyck; and in the U.S. and around the world under the leadership of the Council of Bishops. This morning Jesus asks us to be connected to him, saying "*Remain in me, as I remain in you.*" (4) Jesus said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches.*" (5) A vine is made up

of its branches, and the life of the vine is the life of the branches. Jesus lives in his branches, and his branches live in his life. The vine bears fruit through its branches, and the branches bear the

fruit of the vine. The vine is not totally dependent on any one branch or group of branches. Therefore, it can endure pruning without withering and dying.

In the face of possible pruning, Jesus declares, "*Remain in me, as I remain in you.*" (4) In other words, 'don't separate yourself from me,' 'don't try to make it on your own,' 'don't renounce your membership in me.' We are not without a family. We are not without a country. We are not without a community. Above all, we are not without Jesus Christ as a source of life.

I learned that one of the important American values is individualism. Americans emphasize privacy and respect individuals' opinions, decisions, and characteristics. However, I think individualism does not mean separation or isolation from others. Americans value community and cooperation as well. We need to connect with others and cooperate with them. We could not live like an isolated island.

In this morning's text Jesus challenges us to stop thinking separation or isolation with a plea of independence or individualism. Instead, remain in Jesus, abide with Jesus, and realize God's presence. "*If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*" (6) The vine must be both nurtured and pruned. Jesus' abiding presence must be nurtured. 1 John tells us simply what fruit we must bear: "*Let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.*" We are doers, actors, and we quickly like to translate the Gospel vision into deeds. The vines must bear fruit that will lead to full discipleship, and unfruitful vines wither and are used only for firewood.

We have a comfortable worship service this morning by using microphones, lights, and power point in this cool sanctuary. We can use those technologies because they are connected to power. Likewise, we need to connect to Jesus who continually gives us endless power, courage, and love in our lives.

Have you ever been discouraged, anxious, or angry? Have you ever felt no hope, no confidence, and no excitement? Then think to yourself whether you are connected to Jesus. Jesus who died for us and rose again, brings us new life and wants to connect with us. We can be extensions of his work, his love, his fruit-bearing, his glorifying of the Father. We also need to connect with one another in praying, loving, and caring. Let us connect with those who need our help in our community and world. Jesus says us once again, "*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*"(7)

### Questions for Reflection

1. What connections do you have? Do they benefit you or disadvantage you?

2. How do you connect with others? How do you connect with Jesus in your ordinary life or crisis?