



## Finding Our Place in the Vineyard

May these words be your words, O God. May they be nourishment for our souls,  
and inspiration for our ministries. Amen.

100 Fold. 100 Fold! Isn't that what we all want? We want to be so effective that our harvests produce tons of fruit – more than anyone can imagine! How do we do that? Well, of course we don't do it alone. We are part of something bigger. We may labor and toil in the hot sun (or freezing rain!), but our labors are matched with those of many others, and, we pray, with God.

So part of our job is finding our place in the something bigger, finding our place in the vineyard. Sometimes we are the sower, sometimes we are the seed, sometimes we are the soil, the ground into which the seed of God is planted. Our roles may change over time and in different circumstances. Our identity never changes.

Our readings for this service are probably pretty familiar to most of us – perhaps even beloved by many. They each speak to a part of our job description – as Christians and more particularly as Christian educators. They help us to find our place in the vineyard.

Part of our job is to tell the story – to share our own stories and also to tell and re-tell the Story of God's saving love. This is something that is to be repeated. A lot. Recite the story so much that you and those with you can't get away from it. Weave it into every part of your life – your going out and your coming in, your rising and your resting, your quiet moments and in your busiest times. We do this to remember who we are, and whose we are. Reciting our story helps us to claim our identity, to articulate that identity to others, to form children, newcomers, all of us in that identity. Reciting our story helps us remember.

To remember – to put back together the pieces. We also do this by remembering that we are a part of a community, part of the Body of Christ. Feel yourself grafted onto the People of God. We do not journey alone. We have a whole great company along with us – seen and unseen, dear friends and folks we only know from the list-serve! People long ago and far away, people sitting

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next to us right now. Together we are the People of God. You have a place in that Body. You bring your gifts, and offer them up to work with others who bring different gifts. Together we sing praises, tend the needy, lift up prayers, offer love. Together we recite the story. Together we find and offer spiritual nourishment. Remember that you are a part of the Body of Christ.

Of course we need to cultivate our own individual relationship with God as well. Without a sense of God in our personal lives, this all becomes theory and talk, and soon it becomes lifeless drudgery. We need to develop spiritual practices that nourish our own sense of being a beloved Child of God, that bring us back to the source of our being, the source of our gifts and our call. We need to tend this relationship, nourish it, let its roots deepen and its fruits blossom. This takes time and work, but mostly it takes intention. It is amazing to discover how powerful intention is – what we focus on, can grow. We get to choose what merits our attention. Cultivate your personal relationship with God.

And we need to consider our call – both the big picture – who are you created to be? But also in the moment – what is needed of me now? We need a familiarity with the Story, the support and challenge of the gathered community and a deep personal relationship with God in order to hear the call each day. And these things will also give us the strength to live into our call. We are called in good times, and in difficult times. We are called into situations we embrace eagerly, and into circumstances we wouldn't wish upon anyone. We are all called to persevere throughout the changing times, - to be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable - to carry out our ministry fully, to keep on planting, tending, growing, and abiding, throughout it all. Consider your call.

And through it all – we are to abide – to abide with God. To feel connected. To remember whose we are. For Jesus tells us clearly, and we repeatedly discover, that we cannot do it apart from God. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. We are to abide in God. Together.

May this conference, and this association, the friends you meet here, the workshops and time for prayer and discovery, help you to abide – to rest and renew if that is what you need,

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to recite the Story of God's saving love,  
to remember that you are a part of the Body of Christ,  
to cultivate your personal relationship with God  
and to consider your call – in life and in this moment.  
Amen.

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