

Deuteronomy 5:32 – 6:9

Psalms 119:25-40

Hebrews 12:3-15

Gospel: John 15:1-11

## Sermon January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### *God Prunes Our Branches*

In our liturgy for this week, we are invited to reflect on the winter season. A season many of us in Canada are no strangers to.

Canadian winters are known for the weeks of endless bitter cold (**Image One:** Wintery stormy day). Icy snowy roads that we often get our vehicles stuck on or roads where we find ourselves in a bumper-to-bumper car accident. Snow squalls and blizzards that isolate us in our homes for days at a time. Sore backs due to the constant shovelling or from slipping on our neighbour's unsalted walk way. Exhausted from wrestling all the winter gear onto the children before driving them to school.

There are a lot of negative connotations that come to mind when we think of our great Canadian winter (**Image One**).

Of course, the children worshipping with us might see our Canadian winter in a much more positive light. Snow ball fights with friends. Building snow forts or snow people. Making snow angels. Going for a skate at the community rink. Tobogganing down the hill. Sipping hot chocolate. Sitting by a crackling fire.

As adults, we get to experience these joys as well. But it seems the negatives outweigh the positives for us (**Image One**). Especially, when aging catches up to us, and colder drier conditions make our bodies ache and ache more often.

Well, whether we see winter for the bitter cold or we see winter as an opportunity to get outside and play. Winter serves an important purpose for God's creation. Winter is a time where the trees, the plants, the grass, the waters, and even a lot of wildlife rest after a busy spring, summer, and autumn (**Image Two:** Bears hibernating). God covers God's creation with a blanket of ice and snow. Sings a beautiful lullaby, and watches as many parts of God's great creation fall asleep for the winter months.

Winter is also a time where God's pruning takes place. Where God prunes that, which is no longer bearing fruit, so that in spring new life will bud with fruitfulness once again (**Image Three:** someone pruning a tree).

Though winter can feel harsh and challenging for us to endure, it is needed for God's creation to fully become what it is intended to be.

Like God's non-human creation, we need time to rest, to regenerate (**Image Two**). Time to be pruned from those things within us that are no longer bearing fruit (**Image Three**). Time to grow into something new. That bears fruit once again.

Of course, we turn the tables on God's non-human creation. In the winter, the plants, the grass, the trees, the water, a lot of wildlife rest. While we are hard at work. It is usually in the summertime where a lot of us seek out rest from the busyness of the year. Or at least this is how it is when our children are in school.

We do seem to realign more so with God's non-human creation in retirement where we rest more during the winter months. Finding our way to warmer climates to escape the bitter cold Canadian winters can bring **(Image One)**.

Whether we are working our tails off in the winter or spending it on the beaches, winter is a season that reminds us that it is important that God's creation, including us, finds time to rest **(Image Two)**. Time to evaluate how we are doing. Time to be pruned **(Image Three)**. So, we can keep growing into the people God created us to be. People who bear fruit. Or in other words, people who act in ways that reflect God's love.

In our gospel, we see that God prunes us in our time of rest and regeneration. God cuts off those branches on us that make it hard for us to love one another **(Image Three)**. Anger, judgment, selfishness, greed. And allows room for new branches to bud. Branches that bear fruit. That help us love one another as God loves us.

Or in other words, God helps us learn from our mistakes, from our mishaps, from our shorting comings. God heals us from those wounds, those things that make us see the world in a negative light. So, we can grow into people whose words and actions are rooted in God's love.

God encourages us to rest, evaluate, and be pruned in all walks of our lives. Not just our individual selves. For example, in the ministries we participate in as a church, we are invited to rest from these ministries from time to time. We are invited to evaluate these ministries during this period of rest **(Image Two)**. We are invited to see where God is pruning this ministry so it will continue to bear fruit **(Image Three)**.

Or, as a community, we sometimes need to take a rest **(Image Two)**, evaluate how we are living out God's love as a community to the people who encounter us, and then be welcome to God's pruning us when our words and actions are no longer bearing fruit **(Image Three)**. Turning us into a community that bears new fruit. Helping us continue to love one another in the way God loves us.

Winter is a season where God reminds us of this important invitation to take time to rest, evaluate, and be pruned.

Because God cares for us. God wants us to be all God created us to be. God wants us to live in a community, in a home, in a world shaped by this fruit, this love.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for the winter that gives your creation time to rest, and be pruned. May we find time for rest and evaluation so we too can experience your

pruning love. So, we too can be pruned into a fruitful creation. Loving one another as you love us. **Amen.**

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