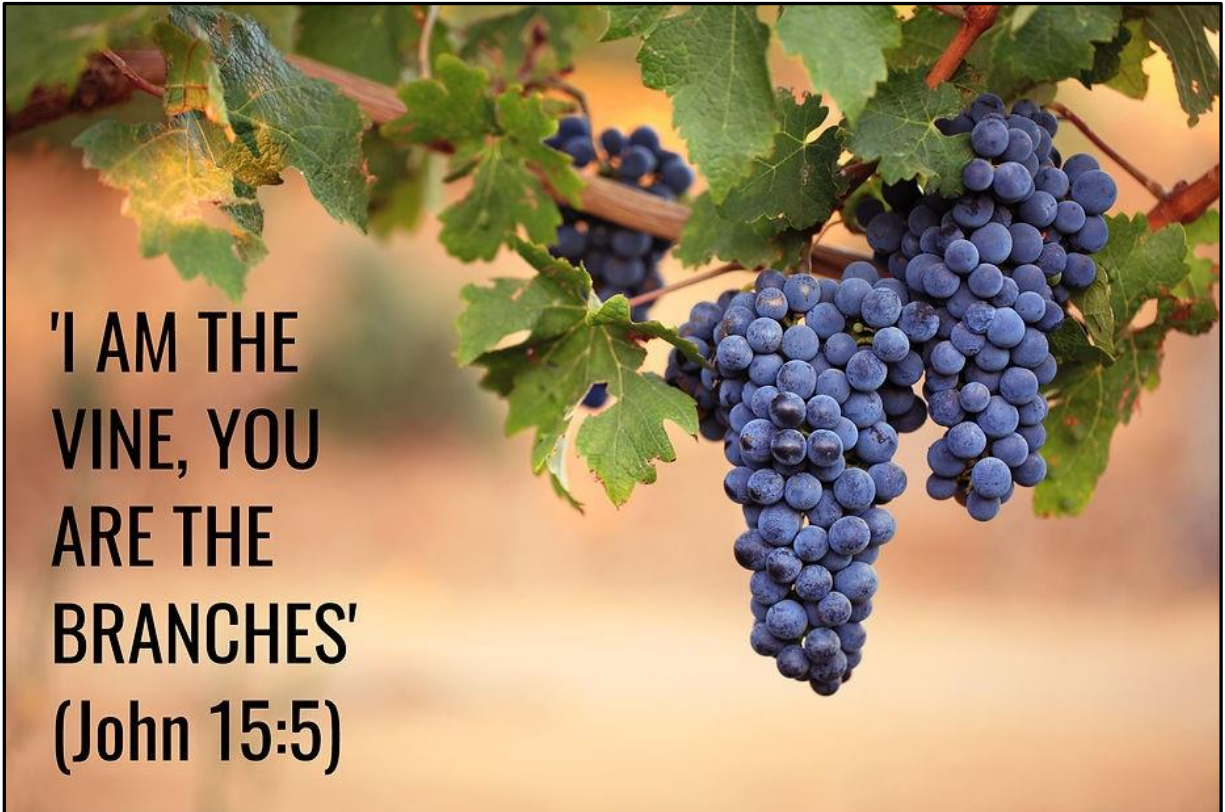


**First Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
River Falls, Wisconsin**

**April 28, 2024**



**'I AM THE  
VINE, YOU  
ARE THE  
BRANCHES'  
(John 15:5)**

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN

April 28, 2024

Fifth Sunday of Easter

10:00 am

Gathering

Most of us were taught that God would love us if and when we change.

In fact, God loves you so that you can change.

What empowers change, what makes you desirous of change,  
is the inner experience of love.

This alone becomes the engine of positive change.

- Richard Rohr, *Essential Teachings on Love* (Orbis, 2018)

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with  
us today!

- The nursery is available for young children.
- Activity bags are available for children.
- Large print bulletins are available from the ushers.
- Please stand when noted by the \*
- Congregation responses are in bold.
- Please stop at the welcome station for a gift.
- Please note our worship service is livestreamed.

*No matter who you are. No matter where  
you are on your spiritual journey, you are  
welcome here!*

*As Jesus' courageous disciples,  
living God's grace, we strive to:*

- *Worship faithfully*
- *Welcome openly*
- *Grow spiritually*
- *Care passionately*
- *Serve generously*

**GATHERING MUSIC**

**WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

L: The vine emerges from the earth,

**P: Nourished and nourishing.**

L: Rises without visible connection;

**P: Roots hidden, promise unknown.**

L: Strong to withstand storms,

**P: Fragile when plucked too soon.**

L: So it is that we grow...

**P: Nourished by invisible connections to the living God,**

**All: Called to nourish that which is seen and that which is yet buried within. Amen**

\*HYMN

*On Eagle's Wings*

Blue #438

## \*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God of Grace, our hearts need pruning from all that inhibits your love and our love for others. Remove from us all things that divert our energies and attention from the way of Jesus. Flood your relentless Spirit through our whole being, clearing away all guilt and shame. Remove the deeply rooted sin that crowds out the fruit of the Spirit. In the sunshine of grace, nourish our souls to bloom with integrity, honesty, and generosity. May the nutrients of your steadfast love in Christ transform us as we dwell in You. Amen.

## \*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

L: In Christ Jesus we are a radically renewed community.

P: **The old things of sin, guilt, and shame are done away with.**

L: All things have become new, including us.

P: **We abide in the forgiving and healing love and grace of Christ Jesus.**

L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

## \*PASSING OF THE PEACE

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

## \*GLORIA (Sung twice)

*Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah, Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah  
Halle, Halle, Halle – lu – jah, Hallelujah, Hal-le-lu-jah*

## Hearing the Word

## SCRIPTURE LESSON

1 John 4:7-21

## PSALM 133 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)

*R*

U - nite us, God, u - nite us in your ev - er - last - ing love.

L: How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

P: **It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.**

L: It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

P: **For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. R**

## Celebrating the Meal

(All Christians are welcome at the table of our Lord. The bread is gluten-free. Red wine and white grape juice are offered. Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.)

### *The Invitation to the Meal*

- L: Beloved in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdalene, on the same day sat at table with two disciples, and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.
- P: **This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, young and old, come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and gather about Christ's table.**

### *The Great Thanksgiving*

- L: The Lord be with you.
- P: **And also with you.**
- L: Lift up your hearts.
- P: **We lift them up to the Lord.**
- L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- P: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**
- L: It is right and good always to give thanks...

### *The Words of Institution*

- L: We praise your name as we proclaim the mystery of faith...
- All: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

### *Prayer of Consecration*

### *Distribution of the Elements*

*Hymns during the distribution of the elements:*

### *One Bread, One Body*

**Refrain: One bread, one body, one Lord of all,  
one cup of blessing which we bless.**

**And we, though many, throughout the earth,  
we are one body in this one Lord.**

***Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man no more.*** Refrain

***Many the gifts, many the works, one in the Lord of all.*** Refrain

***Grain for the fields, scattered and grown, gathered to one for all.*** Refrain

**They'll Know We Are Christians**

***We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored:***

**Refrain: *And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.***

***We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land: Refrain***

***We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride: Refrain***

***All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,  
And all praise to Christ Jesus, God's only Son,  
And all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one: Refrain***

**He Came Down**

***He came down that we may have peace; He came down that we may have peace;  
He came down that we may have peace; Hallelujah forever more.***

***He came down that we may have joy; He came down that we may have joy;  
He came down that we may have joy; Hallelujah forever more.***

***He came down that we may have life; He came down that we may have life;  
He came down that we may have life; Hallelujah forever more.***

***Prayer of Thanksgiving***

**All: We give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Proclaiming the Word**

**TIME WITH CHILDREN**

**Rev. Deb Meyer**

**SONG OF BLESSING**

***I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river,  
I've got peace like a river in my soul.  
I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river,  
I've got peace like a river in my soul.***

**\*STATEMENT OF FAITH (World Council of Churches)**

I believe in the living God, the Maker of all humankind who creates and sustains the universe in power and in love.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God incarnate on earth, who showed us by his words and work, suffering with others, conquest of death, what human life ought to be and what God is like.

I believe that the Spirit of God is present with us now and always, and can be experienced in prayer, in forgiveness, in the Word, the Sacraments, the community of the Church and all that we do. Amen.

**THE PRAYERS & LORD’S PRAYER (debts/debtors)**

Lord in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**GATHERING OUR GIFTS**

*For the Beauty of the Earth*

Chancel Choir

*By John Ritter*

**\*DOXOLOGY**

*Refrain*

Great is your faith-ful-ness! Great is your faith-ful-ness! Morn-ing by  
 morn-ing new mer - cies I see; All I have need - ed your  
 hand has pro - vid - ed, Great is your faith - ful-ness, God, un - to me!

## \*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God of Extravagant Love, fill our spirits with your love and place upon our heads your call to serve all in the name of Christ. We dedicate our gifts and lives to you in faithful service and ministry. Amen.

### Sending

## \*HYMN

*Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

Blue #496

## \*BLESSING

## POSTLUDE

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### SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Deb Meyer  
Celebrant: Deb Meyer  
Cantor: David Reilly  
Liturgist: Jean Smith  
Deacons: Karen Lloyd, Traci Hagberg,  
Lance Lueck, Laura Anderson,  
Jena Most  
Organist: Marsha Pearson  
Nursery: Kahla Fuller  
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman  
Trustee: Jane Truesdill  
Coffee  
Fellowship: Merry Widows  
Counters: Janice Healy, Roz Ostendorf  
*Altar table flowers are given by Bobbie Kuhn  
in memory of Jim Kuhn.*

### CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers  
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers  
Community &  
Outreach Pastor: Deb Meyer  
Youth Minister: Alex Plum  
Music Coordinator &  
Bell Director: Jamie Mills  
Choir Director: Sarah Plum  
Organists: Terry Mithun,  
Marsha Pearson  
Building Manager: Timothy Bylander  
Church Moderator: Kathy Rausch  
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke  
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller  
Custodian: Farnum Fuller

### Treasurer's Report

	<u>Apr 21, 2024</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 6,145	\$ 205,420
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,463	\$ 167,408

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

\*Includes annual and monthly gifts.



### Offering QR Code

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code
3. Click the tab 'Give Online'

Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

**Those who are ill or recovering:**

Dorothy Shavers (mother of Rene Bylander), Carsten (grandson of Duane Church), Sue Taylor, Judy (mother of Lara Koecher), Melissa Oscanyan (friend of Ann Nelson), Glenn Kees, Marshall Skule, Linda (daughter of Chuck White), Jeff (brother-in-law of Janice Healy)

**Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:**

- For our church mowing team as they soon begin their season (there is room for one more mower— training provided, contact the office)
- For those from our Mission Team and others who hosted Earth Fest at UWRF this past Saturday, that it may inspire us to better care for God's gift of the good creation
- For Pastor Stacy as she has begun her sabbatical, that it may be a time of rest, renewal, and growth
- For our Music Team who offered the most recent Music at First Church concert celebrating the music from Ken Burns documentaries, bless you
- For the Northwest Association Annual Meeting, which was April 16 in Eau Claire, a gathering of the 60 some UCC churches in Northwest Wisconsin celebrating our common mission

**Prayers for our World:**

- For civilians caught in bloody conflict in Israel and Gaza who are always the ones who suffer in times of war, may a new way forward be found to bring lasting peace
- For those fighting cancer and those working to find a cure, may your efforts be fruitful

**Prayers of Thanksgiving:**

- For those who planned and participated in our third annual Earth Fest!
- For all those who helped and participated in our Wednesday School as they wrapped up their year last Wednesday, bless you!
- For the Among Friends Program, which meets here at church on Tuesdays to help those with dementia and their families by providing a fun and safe place for them, may they be blessed with more participants and volunteers!
- For our baptism boom which is now at 8 children of God in 4 months including Hope Withers (Erik and Vanessa) baptized February 25, Laney Sitz (Heather and Dan) baptized on March 3, Nora Koecher (Dan and Mari) baptized on March 10, and four Thompson children (Talia, Orion, Oliver, Tova) to be baptized on May 5, and Dean Wilhelmy (Heidi and Mason) to be baptized on May 19, may they all grow in love and faith!

**For those grieving the loss of loved ones:**

- For the family of David Gerrish who died this past week, may his family be comforted
- For the family of Lillian Tan whose brother James Tandias died recently, may his family be comforted as they gathered in Marinette for a Memorial Service on April 20
- For the family of Dahn Carrison as they gathered to celebrate his life on April 26, may they be comforted
- For the Rausch family mourning Bill, the Fosmo family mourning Harold, the Prochnow family mourning Neal, the Sorensen family mourning Dorothy, the Carrison family mourning Dahn, may you be strengthened through the care of others

If you have people you wish to include on our prayer list, please contact the church office or one of the pastors.



## Announcements

*No matter who you are. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you are welcome here!*

### Loving God

**New to Church:** Are you a first-time visitor? Please stop at the welcome table in the gathering area to receive a special welcome gift from us!

**Sunday Morning Text Study:** Join us each Sunday morning, **9:00–9:50**, to explore the scripture texts used in that Sunday's worship. Participating in this discussion is a great way to prepare for worship.

**Adult Bible Study** meets on **Wednesdays from 1:00–2:30 pm**. The group is reading and discussing *Jesus is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* by UCC pastor and writer Martin Copenhaver. For more information, contact the church office.

### Loving Neighbor

**Relay for Life Follow Up:** Thank you very much for your generous donations for Relay for Life events. The money raised for the Relay event goes to the American Cancer Society. Our church team raised **\$1,784** putting us in the Rising Star bracket. The **community Relay for Life event has raised over \$80,000**. They will continue taking donations into August for the 2024 event.

**Red Cross Blood Drive:** A Blood Drive held at the church will be **Wed, May 15, from 11:00 am–5:00 pm**. Please call 1-800-733-2767 or visit [www.redcrossblood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org) and enter: firstcongregationalrf to schedule an appointment.

**Scarves, Mittens, & Hats:** Join our knitting group by making scarves, mittens and/or hats for school age children. We are supporting Basics for Local Kids in Pierce & St. Croix counties. You can make items at home from yarn, fleece or wool or join us on Thursdays at 10 am. If you have questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103.

**First Church Companions:** The “**Companions**” meet quarterly to support each other, help new companions, and discuss questions. If you are willing to visit with someone in our church community and connect at least once a month with a call or visit, please sign-up. If you are interested in receiving regular visits, there is also a line on the same sign-up sheet for “**Buddies**.” Contact Pastor Deb or Lu Lueck with questions.

**Among Friends** is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce and St. Croix Counties. For more information, contact them at (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: [amongfriendsrf.com](http://amongfriendsrf.com) and Facebook page. It is held at the church on **Tuesdays 9am to 3pm**.

**Among Friends Volunteer Needed:** Among Friends is seeking someone who can spend 2-3 hours with them **each Tuesday in April from 10:30 am to 1:30 pm**. That person will be there as someone who will spend time chatting with our participants. Please contact the church office for more information.

### Loving Self

**Learning Community Event: In Our Own Voice, The Journey Toward Mental Wellness** will be held **Tuesday, April 30 at 6:30 pm**. Members of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will share their personal stories of what it is like to have a mental illness or to live with and care for someone with a chronic mental illness. Discussion will center around how we as a church can become more informed, inclusive, and responsive to those who have mental health needs. The session will conclude with question/answers, a survey and resources for attendees. Dessert will be provided. Join us!

**Inquirer's Class:** New to church? Want to know more about our life and ministry? Join us for the Inquirer's Class on **Tues, May 7 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm** in the Fellowship Hall. At this 90-minute gathering, you will meet church leaders, other new folks and learn more about First Congregational Church. Dessert and childcare are provided. Please sign up on the table.

**Game Day Sunday, May 19 at 11:30 am:** A Sandwich and Salad Bar will be served. Free-will offering. Join us for a time of playing cards or board games as well as doing puzzles. Games, cards, and puzzles will be provided. We also encourage you to bring your favorite games, etc. Please sign up.

**Softball News:** Our church will sponsor a softball team in the River Falls Church Family League. The family league is a co-ed division allowing players to play at the age of 14. The co-ed description requires teams to have three women on the field at all times. The games are played on Monday evenings at Hoffman Park. Games will begin the first Monday after Memorial Day and continue until the middle of August. Any questions, contact Sarah Plum at (715)418-9393 or Deb Hoffman at (612)308-4945, [debhoffman234b@gmail.com](mailto:debhoffman234b@gmail.com).

**VBS Volunteers:** Please volunteer to help with Vacation Bible School! We need adult and teen workers. VBS will be July 29–August 1, 9:00–11:30 am. Pastor Stacy will be back for VBS. To volunteer, please sign the list on the sign-up table or on the church website.

**Merry Widows:** They will meet on **Wed, May 15 at 1:00 pm at Green Mill in Hudson**. All widows are welcome to join us for lunch and conversation! See JoAnn Lentz for more information.

**Women's Group:** Interested in fellowship and community with other women? Pastor Deb invites you to join her at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month. Please bring a sack lunch. The next meetings will be **May 14 and 28**.

**Men's Group:** The group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** for coffee, treats & conversation. Next meetings are **May 7 and 21**. Join us! Talk to Pastor Chris for more information.

**Let's Knit Together:** Calling all who knit, crochet or have a craft that can be brought to church or want to learn. Join us **Thursdays at 10:00 am in the Fellowship Hall**. We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. Questions, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or [firstroe@gmail.com](mailto:firstroe@gmail.com)

**Church Yoga:** The church yoga group meets on **Tuesdays and Thursdays** in the church Fellowship Hall from **9:00-10:00 am** and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

**Cribbage Night:** The group meets on the second Monday at church. Players are asked to donate \$2 & the group decides which charity to donate to. Playing time is **7pm**. All players & abilities welcome. Next game will be **May 13**.

### ***Youth Events***

**Scholarship Forms Due May 5th:** Please be advised that all church scholarship forms are due in the church office by **Sunday, May 5**. Church Scholarships come in three forms: Senior High School Scholarships for graduating High School Seniors which require an essay, recommendation letter and application. Continuing Education Scholarships which require a brief essay and application which are for those already in college, technical school or graduate school. And Spiritual Growth Scholarships for those going to church camp or mission trips. Questions can be directed to Jenny Luedtke chair of the Scholarship Team.

**Vacation Bible School:** Children age 3 through completed grade 5 are invited to Vacation Bible School. The theme is *Christian Art: Stop, Look, Listen* and will feature Bible study, children's literature, Christian art and architecture, music, and an engaging variety of art projects from painting to felting. VBS is free and open to all community children. Registration forms are online or at church. Dates are **July 29–August 1, 9:00–11:30 am**.

**Summer Children's Musical:** Children who have completed grades 1-6 are invited to produce the musical *Rescue in the Night: The Story of Daniel in the Lions' Den*. Rehearsals include singing, learning lines, and working on the set and props. The show will be presented on Thursday evening. All are welcome and there is no charge. Registration forms are online or at church. Dates are **Aug 19-22, 9:00 am–Noon for Rehearsals and Aug 22, 6:30 pm for Dinner and the Show**.



**A Learning Community Event**

**In Our Own Voice,  
The Journey Toward Mental Wellness**

**April 30, 2024 @ 6:30pm**

**First Congregational UCC, River Falls, WI  
110 North Third Street**

**Members of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
will share their personal stories  
of what it is like to have a mental illness or  
to live with and care for someone  
with a chronic mental illness.**

**The session will conclude with question/answers,  
a survey and resources for attendees.  
Dessert will be provided.**

**Please come and learn how we can support  
those who have mental health challenges  
in the church and community.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON: 1 John 4:7-21**

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**GOSPEL LESSON: John 15:1-8**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.