

“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.” John 15:1-3

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” Matthew 13:24b-30

## My Best

Why? Why did it happen, again? They said that my best efforts were beautiful and, now, look at what they have done: there is little remaining of me for I have been pruned. It feels like there is so little for me to start over with.

I've had broken branches from the kids playing. They run past me but come too close or their ball hits me. Sometimes winds whip me and break my branches. Yes, these broken limbs hurt as much as being pruned but they are accidents, unintentional. However, look at me! All the growth that I had accomplished is gone; my best efforts are dumped as yard waste. I'm left with a small stump and my roots. A couple of shoots, which were adorned with leaves and blossoms are, now, stubs that extend to dead ends.

Last summer, people came to visit me. They looked at me with appreciation. As I brought forth blossoms, especially the exceptional ones, they would extol the beauty of them. Sometimes, they would cut the blossom from me. Of course, this would hurt but the blossom would be placed in a special place for everyone to see. However, it would soon wither but my best effort would wither, if it remained on me.

It saddened me, though, that my leaves were considered secondary to the beautiful blossoms, though each was equally a part of me. There was one person, who appreciated my work but who didn't cut me. This guy would photograph the blossom and would include some leaves. It brought me joy to have my efforts, the blossom and the leaves, being appreciated and saved for others to see far beyond the wilting that would surely come.

Please understand that I know my imperfections. The blossoms from me are not all "perfect". Some blossoms are deformed by branches, others are shadowed from the light, while still others are whipped by the wind. I bring forth leaves, not just blossoms but the leaves are not as pleasing to the eye, as the blossoms. I need the leaves to live, yet they are not appreciated, except to diagnose my health.

This garden that I live in is not too healthy, either. The gardener is diligent but there are many bugs, which afflict me. Then, there are rust, molds and lots of other maladies to attack me. I am not the only rose bush, in the garden and there are many other plants; there is much to do in caring for all of us. I am thankful for the gardener's attention to me. The gardener, when helping me, is often poked or cut by my thorns. I don't want to do this but thorns, as with leaves and blossoms, are a part of me.



Sometimes, I get so anxious to grow, to reach for the light, that I don't allow the limbs to get sufficient strength. Each limb must be strong, yet flexible. In my zeal to grow to the light, some branches are not strong enough. They cannot hold up their own weight. Their flexibility in the wind is too great, so they break. The gardener might tie the weak limbs to support them for the rest of their life or these branches may have to be pruned and discarded, as yard waste.

No. I am not making excuses, for my imperfections. Instead, I acknowledge that my best includes weakness and need for the gardener. It is truth that most of my needs, I cannot provide for myself.

But, look at me. Why am I barely a stump? Did I do something wrong? Were my best flowers not good enough? Are my best efforts, my growth, little more than yard waste? People don't come to see me. If they walk past me, their eyes don't even glance my way. I am not even recognized among the mulch and twigs that cover the ground around me.

A strange thing happened, the other day. The guy with the camera came and knelt beside me; he looked at me. He saw my stump and the dead ends of the pruned limbs; he studied the tiny sprouts of new limbs. With a smile, he took photographs of me!

Imagine that! Somebody appreciated me, as I am. Photographs of my budding limbs, tiny leaves and thorns were taken. Even the dead ends of the stubs were photographed. Yes, I'll bring forth beautiful flowers, in time, but he photographed the real me, the whole me: the "me", from which a mature life is growing, from which beautiful flowers will come.

Truly, these photographs are the best of me. The pictures show my living of God's Will. Every day, my limbs keep growing and new ones begin to replace the broken/pruned ones. New leaves cover my limbs, for my nourishment and support of the blossoms. Many blossoms will come from my limbs and a few will be exceptional; though all will wither and die, I will bring forth more.

I am alive and will live my best, regardless of past hurts and setbacks. Though the future will include more hurts and trials, I give from my heart, now, and without reservation. And for the hurts, which I cause, and my imperfections, please forgive me; prune and help me to grow and mature. Though I am but a rose bush, I hope that you love me, that you love all of me. This is so much for me to hope for but I give no less from my heart.

Let us live together in God's Will of Truth and Love.