

October 2023

At farmstands and markets, gourds and pumpkins are ripe, round, and ready. For many local gardeners, this year's heavy rainfall has meant a modest harvest. Yet the world is green and golden, and the first crimson trees are blazing. Around us the vines share their yield, and the branches turn vivid. It's a season of storytelling.

Such storytelling, connecting our individual and village church stories to the great narratives of Jewish and Christian tradition, can be imagined through vine-and-branches imagery. In John 15, Christ says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit ... remain in me and my words remain in you ... As the God has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ... ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."*

As we consider this autumn, look how the fruits of love and community are visible in this season. For instance, pumpkin people in rainbow hues wave, pose, and illustrate familiar tales all over the village and the valley. It's worth a walk or a drive around town to appreciate all the creativity. The church's composition is having fun with the Barbie movie's revival of this iconic and newly-interpreted toy! Our tag line is: *"When the world tries to put you in a box ... love sets you free!"*

We have annual rituals that reinforce cultural stories and tell new ones. During the first several days of October, crowds of people make their way to the Fryeburg Fair to play games, win life-sized stuffed animals, risk stomach-jolting rides, cheer horse races, participate in livestock shows, savor harvest exhibits, eat deep-fried foods, and gather in harvest glory. Local nonprofits have booths and stands in the fair, and hope for our patronage and support. Go eat apple crisp and blueberry crisp. Drink local coffee. Find vendors you know and boost their business. Look for familiar names including local schools and clubs, community centers and agencies, such as the Gibson Center and Mineral Springs, among others. Their displays reveal how students, members, guests, and clients remain competitive, engaged, and learning at all ages, from preschool through the final years of life. Watch for award-winning entries by individuals and educational exhibits by organizations like Tin Mountain. Go stomp your feet to the tunes of the DellaValla Bluegrass Trio and other favorite musicians!

Within our church, we're following the 'narrative lectionary' to visit the earliest scriptures of our faith tradition, starting with men and women in Genesis and Exodus and moving toward the birth of Christianity as recounted in sacred texts. Alongside this series of sermons, lessons, and studies, we're exploring how to become a stronger small church now and going forward. Part of this happens by visiting the stories of our past, and linking our own experiences to the timeline, history, and future of our church.

Watch for creative use of the vine-and-branches motif to introduce and expand Jackson Community Church's timeline. We'll celebrate anniversaries, interview friends and members, and recall special moments from the church's past. All will be connected to the vine. Along the way, we'll ask for your input, hold appreciative inquiry sessions, and integrate our living anecdotes with dreams for all that God calls our church to become in

years ahead. *Please say YES to invitations to participate in our church's storytelling and community-building in the season to come.*

All of our stories — personal, communal, and global — become branches bearing much fruit, because of their connection to the great vine of stories from which we all spring. They are most bountiful and beneficial when they are fed by Holy Love's deep, ancient, and life-affirming roots.

May this be a season of inspiration and reflection for all of us! Blessings!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Doktor". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Rev Gail Doktor