

It's a holiday in the lives of all the university, known officially as Reading Day. At least, that's what the academic calendar says. For the well studied, it's nap day. For the less prepared, it's cram day. For many Embrace students, it's Magic Mountain day. All these names, though, act as a salve for the real nature of the day: the last day before finals, the official sign of the end of the semester. For some, this means internships or summer jobs. For some, trips and vacation. For some, new jobs in new locations. For others, a future unknown. It's a bittersweet time where we celebrate and say goodbye. In the midst of this tension, we might feel uncomfortable, unsure how to proceed.

I think the best way is to talk about kudzu. That's right. Kudzu, the practically indestructible vine that originates in Asia and parts of the South Pacific.

Kudzu isn't native to this continent.

Yet, drive most any interstate in the U.S. and you'll see, kudzu thrives.

And yes, kudzu bears fruit. They're actually a kind of pea. If you're lost in the woods, the leaves, flowers, roots, peas and pods are all edible.

Also National DNA Day. When I was on one website looking at the DNA ancestry tests, a headline said: "Nigerian? Sicilian? What are you?" Now, I ordered a kit, so don't get me wrong: I'm interested in my geographic and ethnic origins.

However, that question - *what are you* - sterilizes and simplifies the beautifully complicated question of identity.

One graduate told me that this year is the year they're feeling most connected, which is a beautiful legacy for Embrace and our Capital Community. It also makes it terribly hard to leave.

That's why this declaration from the Psalm is so essential: "all the ends of the earth shall remember."

Remembrance of communion.

Our God is the kudzu vine that, wherever it is transplanted, thrives and connects all the branches to the source of life. This communion meal we share is not just a foretaste of the feast to come, but the taproot from which we grow as branches of the True Vine. This bread and wine nourishes us so that we may bear fruit that nourishes the world.

You are the kudzu of God, resilient branches off of an unquenchable vine.

Of course, there's a end to every good analogy. Kudzu often kills native plants for its own thriving, so let us be clear: God is not a colonizer intending to destroy the natives. God is not an invader intending destruction. Rather than growing over and suffocating whatever she encounters, God's incarnation, God's presence, grows to help all creation thrive.

This may be the last time I preach with some of you in worship, so here's a little secret about me as a preacher. Typically, there's two things I want a sermon to accomplish: enable you to know something more clearly and empower you to do something more impactfully. In other words, I'm always asking myself two questions. As a result of this sermon, (1) What do I want you to know? and (2) What do I want you to do?

So, dear friends, what do I want you to know?

That our God goes before you, wherever you go, and every time you do this in remembrance of Jesus, we are re-tied together as branches on the same vine. The Gospel promise of God's everlasting, never ending love for you and all people goes to all the ends of the earth, and where you remember that promise of God, there too we are with you.

What do I want you to do?

Be the fruit-bearing branches that I've seen you to be. This ministry thrived through nearly two years of transition because of God's goodness and your faithfulness to bear fruit that reflected God's goodness. We've got a community that is growing leaders for the church, professional and volunteer. We've got a community that is ever more diverse. We've got a community that's growing in God's image and God's mission. That's the fruit you're bearing. That's the legacy you're leaving.

So receive this commission: Be those branches wherever you go. Tie in to the vine through communion and community, and leave it ever better, just as you have left us. Know that you are forever beloved by God and share your refraction of that love with your new communities, just as you've shared it with us.