

May 3, 2015
John 15:1-8

Easter 5B
The True Vine

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was a kid, I always had a garden with my parents. We grew tomatoes, peppers, carrots, lettuce, peas or beans, and cucumbers. Sometimes we changed things up and put in potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini, and corn. I would also help the neighbor lady with her garden as well. She also had strawberries and a raspberry patch. I enjoy being the dirt and in the garden.

The first four years of ministry, we never lived in a place where we could have our own garden, so we would have a potted garden with tomatoes, peppers, and lettuce. Sometimes they worked, and sometimes they didn't. When we moved here last summer, I was thrilled to be able to have a garden, to have something before me that I enjoy doing. If you take a look at the backyard of the parsonage you will notice that we've been doing some landscaping around the patio area. I've even had the battle with the hops vines, been learning about raspberries and learning about different things that we want to grow.

When I was a kid, I really didn't know anything about what one had to do to take care of the garden, sure I knew I had to keep the weeds out so they didn't take the nutrients away from the other plants, now I am learning that in order to have good fruit, one has to prune certain plants.

I never had grapes, nor do I plan to grow grapes, but with grapes you must prune back the branches in order to have a good crop of grapes. Often times there seems to be lots of material that will go out to the burn pile.

The other thing that I thought I could do at one point is take a branch of an apple tree in my backyard growing up, stick it in the dirt and see if it would grow into an apple tree. Those branches never did, because they were cut off from the tree. They were dead branches and were destined for the burn pile.

You can learn something from Jesus here when it comes to gardening or even being a vineyard owner, in order for a branch to bear really good fruit, one needs to cut off the branches that don't bear fruit and also needs to prune the branches that do bear fruit.

I think about the tomato plant when it comes to this lesson from Jesus. I've had troubles growing tomatoes over the last few years, so I went online to look at what could be done. I learned that before planting the seedling, one should cut off the small bottom branches so that you can plant the seedling deep into the ground to encourage a deep root system. Plus these branches will probably never bear fruit.

As we think about our text a bit more, the grape vine, the tomato plant, and the lifeless apple tree branch that I wanted to grow into a tree, we can see that a branch cannot bear fruit on its own, it must draw life from the vine, from the limbs and trunk of the tree.

Sometimes there are branches that are connected to the vine, but aren't doing anything, they aren't producing fruit, and they are actually taking nutrients away from the branches that will produce fruit. This is a good thought when it comes to plant, but when it comes to cutting someone off from the vine of Christ, why would that have to happen?

Why is the branch there? What good is it, if it isn't producing fruit? That is a good question. The branch is of no use, so yes it deserves to be like the branch that is not connected to, or rather should I say, is not abiding in the true vine.

As Jesus compares himself to a vine and people to branches, and the Father as the vinedresser, He makes it clear that if we abide in Him, we will bear fruit, because He is abiding in us. If you are not abiding in Him, you will not produce fruit. The apple tree branch that I wanted to grow, needs to be grafted to the tree in order to produce fruit. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you have been grafted into the vine of Christ, to bear fruit, you have been grafted to Him through your Baptisms.

Since you are part of the vine of Christ, you receive your nutrients from Him. As you receive those nutrients your fruit grows, especially the fruit that St. Paul writes about in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. St. John also talks writes about the fruit of love in our epistle lesson for today as well. This is the natural fruit that occurs when we are fed by and attached to the vine of Christ.

Unfortunately there are many people that are not attached to the true vine and our not a part of Christ. There are many who live in an uncultivated vineyard and bear no fruit. There are many who are connected to something, but it isn't the vine of Christ. The fruit that it looks like they make isn't fruit at all and isn't very good for you either. It's weak and has no flavor. It's like an unpruned apple tree or an unpruned tomato plant, so those are taken and thrown into the fire. Apart from the true vine, you can do nothing.

Have you ever noticed a plant of any kind and see that it is dead, it is no longer alive? It shows that that portion is not receiving any nutrients from the vine or the trunk/limbs. This can happen to someone attached to the vine of Christ as well, we can remove ourselves from His Word, which is our connection to Him. We can remove ourselves from His family, from the fellowship of believers, where we hear Him speak to us through His Word and Sacraments. When we remove ourselves from the nutrients we need, we will die, our faith will die. When a branch dies or when our faith dies, we are removed from the vine and they are cast into the fire.

That's not the only thing a vine dresser does. The vinedresser also prunes the branches. I learned over the past week that He does this in two ways: "he cuts away

dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living tissue so that the life of the vine will not be dissipated that the quality of the crop will be jeopardized. In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality.” When it comes to pruning it is one of the most important things in the enterprise of a vineyard, and the people who do it must carefully be trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training to the “pruners” so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even at what angle to make that cut.

You can see that pruning is not an easy task, and when it comes to the branches on the vine of Christ, the only one capable to be the vinedresser is God the Father. As the Father prunes living branches, He does it out love so that we can bear more fruit. Oftentimes this pruning process is painful. The heavenly Father prunes back the parts of our lives that are sick or dying. What in your life needs to be cut off so that the Fruit of the Spirit can continue to grow and flourish? What needs to be pruned because it’s interfering in our ability to love? What looks good in our lives but does nothing to contribute to our ability or willingness to love? You and I are sinners in every way, by nature we should be cut off completely from the vine, but yet we are grafted into the vine through our baptisms, but yet we still sin, there are still things that need to be cut off from our life.

Perhaps it’s an addiction, perhaps it’s a hobby that we have that takes us away from the nutrients we truly need. Sometimes the Father allows sufferings or disappointments in life that cause us to fully and more directly trust in Him and point us to spiritual things and away from earthly things. A week ago Friday Miriam woke up from her nap with almost 103 fever. Over the next four days the highest it got was 104, and that was with Tylenol and ibuprofen in her system. This was a scary and had me put my trust in God that He would take care of her. In the end it was only an ear infection, but for four days, we had no idea what was going on. This is just one way God the Father can prune you in order to bear more fruit.

As you remain connected to the vine as forgiven sinners, forgiven sinners that are pruned back, you will bear fruit through the Risen Christ and His gifts to you. As you remain in the vine of Christ, you will continue to receive those great nutrients that flow from Him to you through the hearing of the Word, through the Absolution that you receive, and through the body and blood that you receive in the Lord’s Supper. Through those gifts you receive forgiveness of sins, you hear the message of Jesus Christ, being your life and your light. You receive the nutrients to bear fruit, and as you hear those very words and receive those gifts, God the Father also does some pruning in your life as He removes those sins that prevent you from bearing more and better fruit.

As Emily and I continue to work on our gardens this year and the years to come, I will definitely learn more on how to work towards more and better quality fruit and crops. As I do that, I will be able to connect that work to the work Jesus does for us as the vine, through His own death and resurrection. Even for you as you work with soil, whether it

be your flower beds, your vegetable gardens, or perhaps your acres of crops, you too can see that it takes work, it takes meticulous care to get the crop you want, it also takes good and plenty of nutrients. It's like that with our lives as well, it takes meticulous care on apart of God and it takes good and plenty of nutrients for us to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Now may the true vine that is at work in your lives, keep you connected to the vine, and bring you at least to be a part of His renewed creation.

In Jesus Name, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.