

The 5th Sunday of Easter
May 2, 2021

The Lessons: Acts 8:26-40
 Psalm 150
 1 John 4:1-11
 John 15:1-8

The Hymns: # 611 (1,2,5) *Chief of Sinners Though I Be*
 # 540 (1,3,6) *Christ, the Word of God Incarnate*
 # 805 *Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow*

The Collect: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:

"The Vine, the Branches and the Fruit"
 John 15:1-5
 May 2, 2021

"I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch of Mine that bears no fruit, He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. 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. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

1. Consider The Vine

In our text Jesus calls himself the true Vine. This morning in our Bible class we discovered that when Jesus called himself the Vine, he was referring to himself as the true Israel. The people of Israel had long considered themselves to be God's vine. In many places the Old Testament speaks of Israel being like a vine that the Lord had planted. In Isaiah, chapter 5, Isaiah sings a song: "Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: my beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." In another place he speaks of God taking His vine out of Egypt and planting it in the promised land. With great care and the love of a true gardener, God had high expectations for His vineyard. But alas, it yielded only wild grapes

Isaiah goes on to sing of the wickedness of Israel. They had forsaken the God who created them and loved them. They despised the poor, took advantage of them, treated them unjustly. They did not

love their neighbor as themselves. And they followed false gods – gods of their own making, forsaking the true owner of the vineyard, disobeying His commands. And for their disobedience and faithlessness, God Himself tore down the vineyard through the conquering forces of the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Centuries later, when Jesus says “I am the TRUE Vine”, he is contrasting Himself to faithless Israel, and declaring that He is the righteous Vine that God had intended Israel to be – Israel reduced to One True Man.

Since the Fall of Adam, everyone conceived of man and woman is by nature sinful and in need of the cleansing. Each person born in this world is born unto death and has the need of being born a second time. That is condition of each son and daughter of Adam. To deny this is to deny the reality of death itself; to say that death is only a myth. To say that Jesus is the Vine is a declaration of the truth that the world needed the Savior.

The Son of God has been sent into this dead and dying world by the Father. The Son of God was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is embedded here to be the source of life for the branches and the production of all the fruit that comes from the branches. Jesus the Vine is watered in the Jordan River as the Holy Spirit descends from above and the Father says, "This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

There, in the Jordan River, the Vine stretched out His arms from the east to the west to take all the sins of the world upon Himself that all your transgressions may be removed from you as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Three years later, the True Vine is nailed to the cross. There He withers, suffering from inflicted injuries, from dehydration, from abandonment. Even the sun refuses to shine and the earth tears itself apart. He dies in that God-forsaken place and then is planted in "a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid" (Luke 23:53).

But behold the Vine. Though He died, yet He lives and rooted from within that tomb the Vine rises in the midst of a garden from which He will bear much fruit. So St. Paul affirms when he writes to the Corinthians: "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a Man has come also the Resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Him".

2. Now, Consider The Branches

The branches are the followers of Christ - His disciples – His Believers. Jesus declares to His own, "I am the Vine, you are the branches." You BECAME a branch because, and only because, you were connected to the Vine, the Incarnate Son of God. You did not become a branch because of your genealogy, your race, your economic position or educational level, or because you have a special talent, or because of your years of service in the church, your standing in the congregation, or your good works and fruits of faith.

Now, certainly if you are a follower of Christ you would not claim that any of these are the reason for becoming a branch. However, the temptation to appeal to one of these is always there and too often each of us reverts to one of those claims. To do so is sin and it is confessed as such by the branches who abide in Christ and recall His comforting Words that, apart from any fruit that you might bear, "you are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you."

You ARE a branch because you abide in Jesus the Vine. Whether by Baptism, that is the Word of God connected to water, or by the proclamation of the Good News, that is the preaching of the Word, you were brought into Christ. That is how you and I became a branch, as Galatians 3:27 tells us: "for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" and as we read in 2 Timothy 3:16: "you have been acquainted with the sacred writing which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus".

You REMAIN a branch because, and only because, you are connected to the Vine, that is, you are abiding in the Incarnate Son of God. You do not remain a branch because of your genealogy, your race, your economic position or educational level, or because you have a special talent, or because of your years of service in the church, your standing in the congregation, or your good works and fruits of faith.

Now, certainly if you are a follower of Christ you would not claim any of these as the reason for **remaining** a branch. However, the temptation to appeal to one of these is always there and too often each of us falls to one of those claims. Such boasting in ourselves is sin and it is confessed as such by the branches who abide in Christ and recall His comforting Words that "you are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you." You remain a branch because through Christ the sacramental juices from the Vine flow into you ... the cleansing water of Life from Christ the Vine, the absolving Word of forgiveness and the ever-flowing sap of our Lord's Supper.

3. Now, Consider The Fruit

What about the fruit? Before God only those works are good which are done for the glory of God and the good of man. Such works, however, no man performs unless he first believes that God has forgiven him his sins and has given him eternal life by grace, for Christ's sake, without any works of his own. Good works do not come before faith or before being in Christ; they always follow and are a result of God's grace giving life to the individual.

Jesus gives a clear example of this in the Gospel Reading for today. Imagine a branch on the ground, totally separated from the vine, completely dead and having no fruit on it. Would you call anyone a true vinedresser who comes up to that separated, dead and fruitless branch as say, "I've good news for you. Bear fruit and then you can connect yourself to the vine. Bear fruit and you will then have water, nutrients, and all that you need. Earn the right to the water so you can claim it because of the fruit that you bear. You can do it, right"? That, even a child recognizes, is silly and stupid. Such a vinedresser needs to be exposed as a nut case and driven from the vineyard.

How much more when we speak of salvation. Good works do not go before or trigger God's forgiveness, eternal life and salvation. Good works are a result of God bringing you into Christ and keeping you as His own. Or, as the Savior Jesus says to His disciples, "You are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. 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. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, states it this way, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

What are these good works? A good work is anything that the Christian does in faith according to the Ten Commandments. With respect to God that means fear, love and trust. With respect to your neighbor, as Luther says, "consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker?" ("The Small Catechism," Confession). Are you a member of the armed forces, a teacher, citizen, nurse, ditch-digger or student? There's no question about the fact that you are a member of the Church and a local congregation for you are a Christian.

Jesus said, "I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch of Mine that bears no fruit, He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

So, what about pruning? First, understand that the pruning that the Father allows and engages in, is always for our own good or the good of the Church. With respect to one's own good, remember the Apostle Paul who prayed that the Lord would remove his thorn in the flesh. Three time the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 9). Paul himself was being pruned so that he could learn to depend on Christ's power in every weakness. And so must we. The branches of the Vine are pruned so that they can bear much fruit. That is God's Word.

Second, remember that the pruning that the Father allows and engages in is never like what took place with the Son of God ... with Jesus the Vine. The Father cut the Son off for those hours on the cross. Jesus suffered the separation that you and I deserved, and He did it in order that you and I might never - not ever - not even for a second be cut off from Him. The children of God are pruned, but never are they cut off or forsaken as Christ was on the cross.

Third, understand the difference between Law and Gospel. The bottom line is that, as a Christian you will bear much fruit that is according to the will of God in His Commandments. Good works will naturally flow forth from you and you don't need to go searching for them. They are the activities of your various vocations. And most importantly, despite the pruning that you may have to endure, the Lord loves you and the Word of Christ remains true, namely, "You are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you." That Word was spoken in your Baptism and you hear that truth in every announcement of the truth that you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.