

John 15:1-8 “The Branches Need the Vine” April 30, 2018
Pastor Don Sutton – St. Paul’s Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Introduction

While grapes are grown and wine is made in many places including our area, we may think of France, Australia, and California as some of the most prominent places for growing grapes and making wine. But Israel is a place that probably outdates most of these in growing grapes and making wine. In Israel these activities went back before the time of Moses. Conditions for growing grapes in Israel have always been good and the need for wine in Israel has been great. One ancient historian observed that because of Israel’s arid climate there was sometimes more wine in Israel than water. While I’m not sure of the validity of that, it’s true that in Israel fresh water was scarce and what there was, was not always drinkable. Thus wine became a staple in the Jewish diet and was regularly mixed with water to make it taste better and to kill the microscopic bugs in the water. Therefore the Jews knew all about vines and branches. So Jesus used the Jewish knowledge to teach his disciples an important lesson we consider today –

The Branches Need the Vine.

The Passover

This lesson was one of the last that Jesus taught his disciples before his death on the cross. His classroom was an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem. The occasion was the Passover Feast. Jesus had celebrated and instituted the Lord’s Supper. Jesus had spoken of his death and gave his disciples needed comfort. He had promised them the Holy Spirit to guide them in their ministry. He spoke of his love for them. He instructed them to love one another. *“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”* There were two things he is concerned about. One is that his disciples continue to believe in him and have life. The other is that they glorify God by loving one another. In this setting and with this purpose Jesus taught his lesson.

Into the Vineyard

To do so Jesus mentally took his disciples into the vineyard. He took aspects characteristic to the vineyard and used them to picture important truths that he himself explained.

Jesus’ word picture began, *“I am the **true vine**...”* In a vineyard the vine receives moisture and nutrients from the soil through the roots and feeds them to the branches so that they have life and produce grapes. In a similar way through Jesus people receive spiritual life and the power to produce spiritual fruit. While people may think they will have life in being connected to different vines – money, success, pleasure, and other worldly concepts – Jesus is the only true vine. When people are connected to Jesus through faith in him they have spiritual life and the power to love him and others – the power to produce much fruit.

The **gardener** is God the Father (v.1). As a vine-dresser cuts out the dead branches connected to the vine and prunes the healthy branches on the vine so that they are more productive, so the Father ultimately

removes those who claim to be connected to Jesus from the fellowship of believers, while doing the things necessary to keep those who believe in Jesus connected to him, strong and fruitful.

The **branches** refer to Jesus' followers. They include the 11 disciples with Jesus and every believer today including you and me. Jesus has connected us to himself through faith as he called us by the gospel and brought us to faith through the working of the Holy Spirit.

The **fruit** are those good characteristics, attitudes and actions that flow from being connected to Jesus through faith. Jesus emphasized loving one another. In Galatians we read of the fruit of the Spirit – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (5:22,23).*” Through St. Paul God told the Ephesians, “...*for the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth ... (5:9).*” These fruit are good works done out of faith in Jesus, to God's glory, according to God's will for the good of others and ourselves. These fruit show that those who do them are connected to the vine and are his disciples.

Bare Branches

Now let's focus on something Jesus says of bare branches and the gardener in vs. 2: “*He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.*” Jesus goes on to explain in vs. 6, “*If anyone does not remain in me and I in him, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*” These branches are people who appear to be “in Jesus”, but they are not. Maybe they once were but worldly concerns – their job, their hobbies, their recreation, their upset with God over some issue, their hurt caused by some called worker or a fellow church member, some other suffering - have distracted them and have caused them to disconnect themselves from Jesus, the vine. This break also may have been hastened by neglect of God's Word and sacrament, or stubborn refusal to repent of some sin – hatred, sexual immorality, substance abuse or greed. As a result, the life that these branches once received through being connected to Jesus through faith, is cut off and they are not able to produce fruit. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). That branch is a bare branch.

Jesus said, “*He (the gardener) cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit ...If anyone does not remain in me and I in him, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are re picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*” Jesus' point is that in the judgment God will send them to hell.

This is a warning to unbelievers. It is a warning to those who were once “in Jesus” but are no more. It is also a warning to us branches who are connected to the vine so that we don't become lax in our relationship with Jesus and let go of the vine. It's reason to check if the problems or pleasures of life and/or the neglect of word and sacrament, are choking or disconnecting us from the vine.

Connected to the Vine

God wants us to be and to stay connected. That's why he sent his Son to redeem us from sin's curse. That's why God the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts. He wants us to have life. The apostle John said of the gospel the Holy Spirit inspired him to write, “*These things are written that you have believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:31).*” God wants us to enjoy spiritual life now and eternal life with him in glory.

Clean through Jesus

God wants us throughout this life to enjoy his peace that comes with the forgiveness of sins proclaimed in the gospel and is ours through faith in Jesus. Jesus alluded to this with his disciples when he said to them, “*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you (v.3).*” This was Jesus' assurance that he was the Christ, the Savior, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Way, the Truth and the Life and that through him his disciples have cleansing of sin, access to God the Father and eternal life.

Connected to Jesus through faith, you and I are clean. We enjoy the forgiveness of sins. As Paul told people, *“Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified (declared innocent) from by the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38,39).* This cleanness is the result of God’s pruning that God did when he brought us to faith turning us from our unbelief and sin to Jesus for forgiveness and righteousness.

Pruned by God

On an on-going basis our gardener Father continues to prune us through his word. His law exposes and picks away spiritually unhealthy stuff from us. Through the gospel God heals us and gives us renewed spiritual vigor as he assures of his love and presence in our lives as well as life everlasting. God’s gospel of Jesus is plant food for us branches. At the same time God also uses troubles and trials to turn us to himself and do some pruning on us, his branches. Through illness, financial problems, family problems, layoffs, persecution, etc., God may move us to think about what is really important in life, help us to get our priorities straight, and draw us closer to him through his word and sacrament, and through prayer.

Receiving Blessing through Prayer

As Jesus gave his lesson he also mentioned the blessing in prayer that comes through our being connected to him, the Vine. *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you (v.7).”* Jesus isn’t saying, “Pray with faith in me and I will give you a billion dollars or any other request you may make.” His point is that if we remain in him we are going to ask for things that are godly and God our Father is going to give us the godly things we ask for. So when we are in need, we can ask God for help and he will meet our need. When we are in danger, we can ask God for deliverance and he will give it. When we struggle with temptation and ask God for help, he will give us strength.

Bearing Much Fruit

God will do whatever we need him to do to help us bear much fruit because that is what he wants and enables us to do. Jesus said, *“This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples (v.8).”* And connected closing to Jesus, that’s what we will do. We will be branches loaded with fruits of faith. We will not be perfect in and of ourselves. But the love God shows us will be reflected to God and others. We will be more considerate, more forgiving, more helpful, less self-centered, more self-controlled, more faithful and less rebellious. There will be less cursing, swearing and abuse. Families will be more caring and supportive. Singles, widows and widowers will experience greater Christian fellowship and friendship. Moms, dads and children will have more power to love and will be loved more. We will make a difference in our workplaces or school. People will see that we are Jesus’ disciples. God will be glorified. This is God’s will for us. This is a reason we are here – alive.

Conclusion

It’s about this time of year that in our area the fruit trees blossom. Those blossoms signal that a tree is healthy and will bear much fruit. Be into God’s word faithfully that that word remains in you so that you blossom and produce much fruit. Remember, the branches need the Vine. Amen.