

Fruitful Branches of the Divine Vine

5th Sun. of Easter – 04/28/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 15:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

vv.1-2, [Jesus said,] **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...”**

v.5, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ I love it! In just the last couple of weeks it's become obvious for all of us to see - spring is busting out all over!

→ Many of the fields have been plowed. Some of the seeds have been planted. Bulbs have sprung up from the ground and fruit trees are in full bloom. Now it's time to get ready for the work – tilling and planning our gardens; fertilizing the lawn, figuring out the weed control in our flower gardens. And we do all of this for what purpose? What are we looking for in the future?

→ Why, it's the beautiful blooms of course! The joy of the harvest: the corn; the wheat, the tomatoes, the carrots and peppers and apples and more!

✘ God's glorious Creation, at this time of the year, seems to bring out the farmer; the gardener in many of us – more for some than others! But, as God has gathered us here to receive His gifts in worship today, His always perfect Word speaks to each and every one of us right where we are at, whether or not we've ever done any farming or gardening at all.

→ It should be clear to all of us, I think, what Jesus is talking about here in chapter 15 of John's Gospel as He teaches about the Vine and the branches. He couldn't say it more directly, Jesus is the Vine, while you and I – we are the branches.

→ And there are only two options here for our identity. Either 1) we don't bear the fruit God has created us to bear, which means we are no longer living branches, or 2) we bear His fruit, because He created us to be His branches connected to His Divine (that is “godly”) Vine.

✘ And He leaves no question about how this happens: God is the one who enables us to produce fruit. It is only possible through the fact that He has connected us, by His power to the Vine, who is Jesus Christ. It's a simple concept: If Jesus is an intimate and active part of our lives as our Savior, then the fruit of that connection will automatically; instinctively, naturally appear.

→ Yes, it's always Jesus, the Divine Vine, who works a fruitful life in us through His Spirit-empowered connection of faith.

I. We can't bear fruit unless connected to the Vine

✘ So, my fellow branches connected to the vine, what kind of fruit is Jesus talking about here? From other places in God's Word we know that this fruit includes things like the attitudes found inside of us. Galatians 5:22-23 calls these the “fruit of the Spirit”: “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (and) self-control...”.

→ Included in this fruit is the God-given ability to resist sin as well as the power to live a Christian life that is filled with good works as we selflessly; even sacrificially serve those who are around us. So, for example, when you find out that the youth in our congregation are soon going to be in desperate need of more adult leadership because God is relocating our current youth leader to serve in another state, and you then joyfully give up some of your free time to help out in sharing the joy that Jesus has given to you with the younger members among us –

that's bearing fruit as Jesus works in and through you for those young souls. Or when you find out that a co-worker is in need of a shoulder to cry on or can't take care of some needed yardwork because of a health issue and you happily give up time watching your favorite team or TV show to support him/her – that's Jesus doing His fruit-bearing work in and through you as His branch.

- ✘ And one good way to know if someone else is bearing that fruit around you is when you admire and commend fellow Christians for their fruit-bearing, and then you hear them say in response something like this: "Thank you, but it's no big deal" or even "To God be the glory." Do you know why a believer in Christ would say such a thing? Because he knows that his strength; she knows that her ability to produce that fruit comes from Jesus, the life-giving Vine! That's why, in verse five, Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

→ Then, just to make sure we really know who's doing what in the Father's vineyard work and what He has created us to do as His branches, Jesus adds this warning: "Apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (vv. 5–6).

- ✘ Those that have big trees in their yards will tell you that, along with the blessings of a big tree – its beauty, the curb appeal that it gives to the property, the shade it provides – they often also make a mess: seeds, leaves, twigs, and branches breaking off all the time. Many times there is a growing pile of branches not far away that is slotted to be used in a backyard fire pit or a fireplace or to go on the next trip to the city dump. And speaking of that, have you ever seen the "dead branch section" at the dump? It's not a pretty sight!
- ✘ Well folks, in our lives as children of God, none of us want to become like those dead branches, do we?

→ And how do we prevent such a death in our relationship with God? Jesus lays it all out for us in our Gospel Reading today. The key to you and me remaining vital, living branches and not becoming dead branches in the kingdom of God is that we always, always, always remain connected to Jesus the Vine in order to receive life from Him.

II. Jesus gives His life to/thru us by Word/Sacrament.

- ✘ That's why Jesus came to earth in the first place: to bring and to give life to you and to me.
 - And boy did we need that, because before Jesus came to us with His life-giving work in our baptism, we were all helplessly dead branches right along with all of mankind. Apart from Him our only destiny was to be picked up and thrown into the fire. That's the truth that Ephesians 2:1-2 declares to us, "you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (the devil), the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience..."
 - Without the Vine's life-blood running through us, we were lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches! But at the right time, even when we were lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches, God the Father planted Jesus Christ, His Divine Vine here in this world. He came to bring life to us all!
- ✘ And yet, at first glance, our loving Father's plan was certainly unusual. In order for you and me to receive life – God, His Son would have to suffer and even, for a time, be cut off from God the Father and die. This life from death though is the only way that Jesus could separate us from the deadly sin that is at the core of our nature. He had to take that sin from us! He had to become our sin on the cross. He had to bear our eternal punishment and that of all humankind.

→ The vine, Jesus, died. He was buried. But in three days, He rose back to life as a new and vibrant vine bursting forth from the earth. Forty days later, as we will soon celebrate, He ascended into heaven.

→ And now, from heaven, Jesus, the living Lord, has given you the great gift of the Holy Spirit; the One who keeps you connected to the Vine, through the life-giving, grace-filled juices of God's Word and the Lord's Supper. This is how Jesus gives you and keeps you in saving faith; how you become and remain active and fruit-bearing in your faith.

⊗ What a gift! What a blessing – to have God's very power flowing in and through our very being so that you and I remain connected to the Vine today, tomorrow and forever! This is how much God loves you; so much that He does all of the work for you to be a living branch as His dear child now and forever!

→ Dear branches, there is nothing in all of the world greater than this; no other connection – whether it's your earthly family, your sports-league, your craft-show, your senior citizen buddies or any other connection you might be inclined to cherish – none of those can ever come close to the depth and significance of this connection we have with Jesus.

→ His love for you, dear friends, ought to be so precious that you let nothing else get in the way of your connection to Jesus; especially those places where He comforts and encourages and feeds and strengthens and cares for you like nowhere else. That's why He tells us in Scripture to be in worship and to study His Word weekly; to come and kneel before His altar and be fed His body and blood for the strength that we need to bear His fruit. It's here that He pumps His powerful grace into and through us as the very essence of life itself.

⊗ But then as we branch out into the world each week, the Divine Vine's life-giving juices continue to help and protect and strengthen us each day as we connect to Him through His Word in daily devotions with our family or individually; as we take our joys and our concerns to Him in prayer throughout our daily activities.

→ This is the connection that God, the great Vinedresser of the Holy Christian Church has established and nurtured so that you can have the confidence that your countless sins are all forgiven; that your place in eternity before His glorious throne in heaven is ready and prepared by His Son. Yes, through God's Holy Word and through Jesus' Holy Supper, you and I remain connected to the life-giving Vine, Jesus.

III. Vine-connected fruit-bearing brings more blessings

⊗ How could there be anything greater than all of that. But dear friends in Christ, there is even more Good News; even more benefits that flow to us, according to what Jesus tells us today in His Word.

⊗ Two great benefits flow to us through our connection to Jesus: The first benefit is prayer. In verse seven Jesus says, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

→ This is Jesus inviting you directly to live in direct communication with Him. It's Jesus saying, "Come to Me in prayer." In particular here it is us praying for Jesus to carry His work forward in and through us. It's the prayer that acknowledges, "Not my will, but Your will be done in my life, O Lord." It's you asking Jesus to guide you in serving Him, knowing all the while that your Father in heaven will provide all that you need as you live in His service.

⊗ Besides a life of prayer, the other benefit of staying connected to Jesus by faith is the absolute delight He gives us of glorifying God as we bear His fruit. Verse eight, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples." You see, Jesus makes us His followers through His saving work and perfect Word. And we, in response – we reveal to the

entire world that we are His followers through our fruit – in our attitudes, our words and our actions.

→ Here's how it works: The fact that we know Jesus and we live in Him...that affects how we talk about others, where we go, what we do with our time, how we spend our money and more. Now we live with a clear purpose; with a confident hope. Oh, we still can have fun, but ours is now the best kind of fun! People now see that we are a little different than others, and they want to know why. It's then that we tell them that all that we do; our reason for life is all because Jesus is our Savior! Think of it as you and me living a "thank-you" life to God. All that we do, we do to honor Him for all that He does for us! That's bearing fruit to the glory of God!

✘ And my fellow branches, that kind of life is always in season. The time to celebrate the harvest is always today when Jesus is our Divine Vine. Yes, when we remain connected to Him through faith, Jesus promises - we are His fruitful branches.

→ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* Amen.