

Sermon 4- 29, 2018 We are the Branches John 15:1-8

Dear Branches of the Vine:

This branch was once part of this plant. It was severed from the main stem. It dried up when it became separated from its source of life. In order for this branch to remain alive and bear fruit it needed to stay connected to the main stem. Apart from the stem this branch dried up and died. It needed the stem for nourishment and life.

The same is true of us spiritually. It is necessary for us to remain in Christ to live a Christian life which is alive and productive. We need Christ as our source of energy and nourishment. We all know this. But perhaps the question we have on our minds is this: How do we as branches, remain connected to Christ?

We are commanded by Jesus to remain Branches of the True Vine.

Shortly before Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane to pray to his Father about his upcoming journey to the cross, he speaks these words to his disciples. Jesus and his disciples had just finished the Passover meal in the upper room where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. At this time Jesus told his disciples they must remain in him as branches must remain in the vine.

Jesus is comforting his disciples about the future. He knew his disciples were worried about the future. Jesus knows that we, too, worry about the future.

(Max Fear book)

Jesus wants to settle the hearts of his disciples. He desires to settle our hearts, too. Jesus promises his disciples that when he is gone, they will not be on their own because the Holy Spirit will come and be with them. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his final days on earth. He is preparing them for his suffering and death on the cross. He is preparing them to be the messengers of his saving word.

Soon after Jesus is finished speaking to his disciples, he is arrested by the soldiers who are led by Judas. The trial and crucifixion of Jesus now follow these last words with his disciples here in John 15. These words were important to Jesus' disciples and they are also important to us for they show the relationship which all believers in Jesus have with him.

The Truth

Jesus makes it clear here who the source of energy and life is in our relationship with him. He says, “I am the true vine, you are the branches.” Jesus is not only the vine, but the one and only true vine. Jesus is the truth. His disciples had the truth with them. They knew the truth. We have the truth with us. We know the truth and the truth has set us free. The truth is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Many people today don’t know the truth. They don’t understand the truth. They don’t believe there can be such a thing as absolute truth. Pontius Pilate once asked Jesus “What is truth?” This is a question many people still ask today. The Apostle John knew what truth was. He wrote: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came, from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

The true vine is essential to life. Again, consider this dried up branch. Without being connected to the stem it died. Once it was severed from its life source it had no opportunity for future life.

So it is with the follower of Jesus Christ. Without being connected to Jesus there is no spiritual life. Jesus says in verse 6: “If 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.”

- **A branch cannot live without the vine or stem.**
- **A person cannot live spiritually or look to a future in heaven without Jesus Christ.**

The Apostle John says: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” I John 5:12 When Jesus says “I am the true vine” he is saying I am the only genuine vine. He is the only way to salvation. The Apostle Peter wrote: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved.”

We live in a world that says there are many ways to God. All roads lead to heaven. This has been the world’s message since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. By nature man has rebelled against God’s way and has come up with his own way of salvation which is really no salvation at all. The bumper sticker “Coexist” is delivering a message that all religions have value and therefore no one should say there is only one true faith. Yet, Jesus made it clear he was the only way, the only truth and the only life.

Going back to the branches and vine illustration one thing that a vine needs is a gardener who will take care of it and clean it. God the Father is the gardener of

the true vine and branches. The Father as the gardener cleanses the branches by trimming them clean. Jesus says in verse 3 “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

The branches of a vine do not make themselves clean, but are made clean by the gardener. Quite often the gardener not only trimmed the branches but he also wiped the dust off the leaves which would accumulate because of the dry weather. The gardener would do anything he could to help the branches bear fruit.

The followers of Jesus Christ are made clean by God the Father. He has cleansed us from our sins. He has declared us justified because of Jesus’ death on the cross. The word of God purifies us as Jesus once prayed to God on behalf of his disciples: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” John 17:17

The disciples did not make themselves clean but it was the word of God which justified them. It is purely by grace that any follower of Jesus is firmly grafted into the true vine. It is purely by grace that any believer of Jesus remains in the true vine. “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” Jesus tells his disciples. We are not sufficient in and of ourselves as Jesus reminds us “Apart from me you can do nothing.” v5

Jesus is our spiritual life line. By being connected to him we are able to life a spiritual life in a very unspiritual world. It’s not easy to be surrounded by unspiritual messages each and every day. It’s not easy to be bombarded by unspiritual messages each and every day. It’s not easy to withstand the temptations of unspiritual messages each and every day.

We need to be connected to Jesus. When the astronauts in space left the safety of their spaceship they would stay connected to it with a tether. We need to be tethered to Jesus. He is our place of refuge and security as we walk out into the cruel and cold world around us. Babies in the womb need to be tethered to their mother by way of the umbilical cord. The cord is their life support. Everything they need for life comes through that cord. Without the cord they would die. The Word of God and the sacraments is our spiritual umbilical cord.

- The Word of the Lord is trustworthy...giving joy to the heart – Ps 19**
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Col 3**
- Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it. Luke 11**

We have been cleansed by the Father through baptism and the word. We are firmly connected by the Father through baptism and the word. May we treasure our baptism! May we treasure the word of God! Through the work of the Holy Spirit we have been grafted into Jesus Christ the true vine.

Through the Lord's Supper we are given the nourishment and strength to remain in the vine. When we partake of the body and blood of Jesus we are reminded of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We are reminded of the blood that has washed away our sins. We are reminded of that which has declared us sinners as righteous before the eyes of God. We need to be reminded of these things because we daily have to fight our old sinful nature and this old sinful world which tries to lead us astray. The forces of evil try to sever us from the true vine so that we will dry up and die.

It is the Word of God that gives us life. Through daily contact with God's Word our faith is strengthened and prepared to fight the onslaught of the devil's schemes that come our way. We remain firmly grafted to the true vine through God's word. May we not neglect God's Word! We are privileged to have free access to it. We are privileged to go to it anytime of day or night. It is here with us. May the word be our guide and foundation of our faith!

A popular song some years ago contained the line: "People, return to the tree of oneness." The musicians who wrote and sang this song were members of the Bahai faith. Bahaim desires to unify all people into one religious kingdom. They believe Jesus is not the only way, but one of many different ways to God. They teach that all religions have the same life saving truths. This is a dangerous teaching. This is contrary to God's word. May God open the eyes of people in the Bahai faith so that they may see Jesus as the one and only true vine in whom they need to be grafted into.

Any branch firmly connected to the vine will bear fruit. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Jesus impressed upon his disciples a simple truth with the branch and vine illustration. Jesus made it clear to them that without him they would bear no fruit, they would not be able to live lives of faith. v4 Again, look at this dried up branch. It will bear no fruit. It can't. It has no life source. Jesus was preparing the disciples to do his work and they needed to know that their union with him was vital and necessary.

We know what happens when people become disconnected from Jesus. We know what happens when believers as branches are severed from Jesus the True Vine. A case in point is to look at the private colleges and universities in

our nation. Most of them were started by Christians for the purpose of preparing pastors and teachers for Christian schools. Schools such as Harvard and Yale were started by Christians to prepare men and women to serve the Lord. Listen to the words of Harvard's student handbook from 1636: "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life...and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning."

Think of that...Harvard's handbook originally spelled out how students were to lay as their only foundation Jesus Christ as they prepared themselves for life. Do you think these words would be in Harvard's handbook today? You won't find them because long ago Harvard severed itself from the True Vine. Believers need to be in Christ, the True Vine.

The disciples needed to hear these words from Jesus. It would be through him that they would preach, teach and heal the sick. It would be through him that they would stand before the authorities and endure the persecution of their faith. It would be through him that they would be ready to die for their Lord.

A branch needs to be trimmed from time to time to keep it productive. A gardener will often trim the branches of a vineyard down to almost nothing to clean them for better production. It may seem that sometimes a gardener may cut off too much from the branch to have it bear fruit again. But when harvest time comes the branch that was cleansed is full of fruit. In this way Jesus says about God the Father: "He cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:2

This cleansing for a Christian may come from God through trials and sufferings. It is at times when a Christian's faith is tested that his faith becomes stronger and produces fruit. You may have experienced some of these trials which have tested you. But through it all you bore much fruit. The fruits of faith were produced by you because your faith was cleansed through trial and suffering.

The purpose for bearing fruits of faith is seen in the last verse here. Jesus says "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:8 Sometimes we may think that our trials and sufferings must not be a part of our faith. We may even think that God is punishing us or that he doesn't love us. But quite the contrary is true. Through our sufferings and trials we are cleansed so that we may produce more fruit. As we produce

fruit we give glory to God and show ourselves to be his disciples. When a branch bears fruit it gratifies the gardener. When a Christian bears fruit he is a witness to the world of Christ's power. For it is through the power of Jesus that a Christian bears any fruit at all.

Our fruits of faith are a good witness to the world for Christ. The Apostle Paul speaks of the fruits of faith in Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Love is the foundation for all of the other fruits of faith that follow. The love we receive from God helps us love the person next to us. This type of love shows respect for the people around us. This type of love recognizes the worthiness of the people in our daily lives. From this type of love will flow peace, patience, kindness and goodness. These fruits of faith which we receive by being connected to the vine will instill in us a sense of joy because we know where our life source is to be found. We don't have to rely upon ourselves for energy to live a life of faith.

We live not to get ahead of our fellow man but to get behind him and be of service to him. At work we strive not to climb the ladder of success because of selfish ambition, but rather because of service to our employer. At school we strive not to be jealous of those who seem to be the most popular because we know that our worth is found in Christ. Our lives are to reflect the fruits of faith as we are connected to the vine. As Christians connected to the true vine we will walk in line with the Spirit. We will fight off the old sinful nature and walk as new redeemed creatures grafted into the vine.

We won't wither and dry up like this branch as long as we remain in the vine. We have God as our gardener. He will keep us clean and productive.