

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

An apple seed is planted. Soon a seedling is seen coming up through the surface of the soil. The rain and sun nourish it, and, as it grows, branches start spreading out from a sturdy trunk. The tiny apple seed grows and develops into a mature tree with willowy branches waving in the breeze. It is a beautiful thing to behold; yet, something more is expected. Apples! An apple tree isn't what it was meant to be until it produces fruit.

We, as Christians, are like that apple tree. As God chose apple trees to bear apples, so He has chosen us to bear spiritual fruit. Fruit is what is expected of all Christians. *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last"* (John 15:16). Paul explained to the Galatians what that fruit is: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit will be evident in the lives of Christians as a natural outcome of Christ living in us. *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:24-25).

Thus we see that fruit is one of God's gifts to us. He is the one who makes fruit grow in us - fruit that nourishes us and blesses our lives and fruit that reaches out to others. This fruit (*"[our] good deeds"*) looks good. It seems to say, *"Taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Psalm 34:8).

### **How Can We Bear Fruit?**

Fruit is not an attitude we psych ourselves up to attain. We're not capable of training our minds to think only good and pure thoughts so that our resulting actions can be then applauded as well. We know that, try as we might, on our own we are unable to bear fruit. Still, as believers, we know that Jesus would not choose us and point us to a task we would find frustrating and impossible to complete. We know that, **through Christ, we can bear fruit.** He stated, *"I 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"* (John 15:5). Jesus is the Vine Who bears the weight of the branches, Who provides needed support, Who gives life-giving nourishment and energy to us His branches. Connected to Christ, the Vine, we branches do what comes naturally to any healthy fruit tree: we bear fruit.

Jesus calls each of us to remain or abide in Him. **Only as Christ lives in us** are we enabled to bear the fruit of His character. Roger C. Palms wrote the following:

That's what life in Christ is all about-abiding. It is not the fruit-producing that matters, it is the abiding. The producing comes from the vine; the branches are only the fruit bearers. To be an abiding branch is to be a fruitful branch. The fruit will come. And the fruit that is borne, whether it be large fruit or small, abundant or not so abundant, is His doing. Our role is to be attached to the vine, to fit into our place - to abide.

Some branches **appear** to be connected to the Vine, but they're **not bearing fruit.** Something is wrong with the connection. God the Father is the Master Gardener who cuts off those branches that are not bearing fruit (John 15:2), and He prunes the healthy branches so they can become even more fruitful.

"Remain in Me," Jesus said. "Abide in Me, and you'll be able to bear much fruit. Apart from Me you

can't do anything." "Love each other as I love you," Jesus commanded. And then He promised to send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. **It is by the Holy Spirit working through God's Holy Word and Sacraments that we abide in Jesus and bear fruit that brings glory to the Father.**

October is stewardship month at St. John. We examine how God has blessed us, and what God expects from us as His children. We all know that God has given us time on earth, talents that allows us to accomplish things in His kingdom, and monetary gifts. All were given in abundance, by a loving God. All were given with the expectation that **we will bear fruit with them.** How we use those gifts becomes important, because it's a reflection of how God is working in our lives – how much fruit we produce depends on the closeness of our relationship with our Creator. May God continue to bless you and help you to bear fruit for His kingdom.

Pastor Travis