

## Easter 5/Confirmation

John 15:1-8

### Connected to Christ

**“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus. The Gospel of John, is one of those books of the Bible, that is special. Now, I'm not saying that any of the other books are somehow less special than John, or less inspired, absolutely not. What I do mean, is that through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John, in very simple words and sentences, is able to bring in gargantuan truths, in just a few statements. This text for today is no different.

Jesus here, uses a simple picture lesson, in order to teach his disciples and us a lesson of incredible importance, shortly before he undergoes his crucifixion. A truth that applies to the entirety of the life of a Christian.

It is the simple image of a grape vine in a garden: **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener... No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.”** And even if you don't have a green thumb yourself, you understand how it works. The vine, the main trunk, produces branches. Those branches in turn produce fruit. As the gardener inspects the plants, he finds branches with fruit, and he prunes away unnecessary pieces, so that it will produce even more fruit. The branches that are not, the ones that are no good, he cuts off, where they wither, die, and eventually are thrown to be burned into the fire.

**"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine."** We understand this don't we? Even little children, grasp this concept. If you pull off a branch from a tree, it will immediately start dying. It's not going to last. It will dry up, become brittle, and great kindling for a campfire.

But this is not a lesson about the basics of horticulture. This is a lesson about spiritual growth, not just spiritual growth, but spiritual survival. And this lesson, for all of its simplicity, somehow tends to become forgotten by people of all ages.

Jesus says, using this as the example, you need to be connected to me. **"Remain in me, as I also remain in you."** Not in the general location of the garden. Not faintly familiar

with the Savior. Not generally acquainted with Christ. Not loosely affiliated with him and his work. No, that won't do. You need to be joined to me. You need to be completely in me. Nothing else will do. And not just that, that connection needs to be continuous. Over and over Jesus states: Remain, Remain, Remain. No jumping around for the time being to wander back, when he is needed, or when it's convenient. No, be completely connected to me, and stay there.

Why? **"He 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."** This is an extremely consequential truth. You, are going to get cut. God is not satisfied with stagnation. God is not content to let things stay the same as they always have been. He is committed to growth. And the tool he uses for that growth, is the knife of the gardener.

And we don't know when the cuts will come, we do know, that that knife is going to sting. It may come in the form of all kinds of trials. The cuttings of the Lord may take the form of physical pain you must endure. It may take the form of a loved one who leaves you, either temporarily or by death. It may take the form of loss, or hurt, or grief, or all kinds of other hardship.

And that cutting will only have two outcomes. It will either destroy you, or it will make you even more fruitful. Either you will be cut off like a withered stick, who becomes separated from the life of the vine, who will be gathered around other sticks, and cast away, to be burned, or you will produce even more bountiful fruits for your good and the glory of the Father. Fruits that contain **"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."**

Why is it, that the same hardship could bring two different outcomes? How can hardships produce fruits of faith? How can suffering bring strength? How can loss bring love? How can pain bring patience? It's because of that connection to the vine. It's connection to Christ.

Jesus here is not singling out his disciples for criticism, he is pointing out how they will grow spiritually. Jesus is encouraging them. He starts with their foundation: **"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."** They are already clean because of what Jesus has done for them. They are saved by the words that Jesus spoke that created faith.

Jesus doesn't need to encourage himself to live in them, it's a promise that he has and will. This connection is not something that we can do by ourselves. The branches are

not brought to the vine because of the fruits they have produced. No it is fruitful because the vine has given them life.

This is a connection that Christ took upon himself with each of us too. Through baptism, you were united with him into his death and resurrection. Through his Word of the Gospel he penetrates and dwells within your very heart, strengthening and preserving our faith. Through his Sacrament of Communion, he is present in a special, intimate way, and comes to you with forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

This is a connection, that God has given to you, whose strength is inexhaustible. As long as that branch is connected, it is going to continue to bloom, and prosper, and grow. The life of the branch can only come from the vine it is connected to. And while it stays connected, it can do nothing but live and prosper. Even when it is cut, is it continued to be filled with the power and strength of the Savior, and it will continue to thrive.

How do you stay connected to Christ? How do you take Jesus seriously, when he repeats over and over again to remain in him? How do you make sure that the cuttings produce blessings rather than destruction. It's very simple. **"If you remain in me and my words remain in you"**

To remain in Jesus is to believe in him. And the chief business of belief is to receive. Day by day, year by year. The more you receive the more the branch grows. As you remain in him, we will turn against anything that would seek to separate and draw us away from him, and it will constantly produce fruit.

Remain in his Word. Be steadfast. Be constant. Be where he gives to you. Be connected to the vine, the only source of strength and salvation, in his means of Grace. Be connected through worship, not because of habit or fear, but because it is in worship, that the wonders of God's grace are put forth in Word and Sacraments. Be connected to him in your own home, read his Word in devotions, and with your family, God feeds you life through it. Be connected in regular participation of the Sacrament, it is there that that the Lord draws near to you, and strengthens you.

When your heart is broken, remain connected to Christ. When the business explodes, remain connected to Christ. When your child is born, remain connected to Christ. When life is easy, when life is hard. When times are busy, when you've got nothing. Remain in his Word, and connected to him, his strength will never fail you. Connected to him, his blessings will never cease. Connected to him, you will never stop growing and producing more and more fruit.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your Savior doesn't want a part of you. He doesn't want a piece of your life. He wants you. He wants all of you. He wants to be the reason you get out of bed, and the reason you sleep in peace. He wants you to be connected to him in every and any part of life. Remain in him. You have his promise that he will always remain in you. While he does, you will always grow. You will always be blessed. Without him, you can do nothing. With him, you will always have what you need. Amen.