

Text: John 15:1-8

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain 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.

⁵ “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. 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (NIV84)

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the many changes of this world, our hearts may ever yearn for the lasting joys of heaven; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord. Alleluia. (John 14:6 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Last week, we had one of Jesus’ I Am Statements. He told us I am the Good Shepherd. Today, another one greets us in our Gospel lesson. *“I am the true vine.”* But today, Jesus does something else. He gives us a You Statement. Jesus says, *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”*

As He does, the words of our last hymn spring to life. ***As the branch is to the vine ... I am His ... may my life show evidences of His grace. And He is mine ... may I remain connected to His Means of Grace.***

Jesus make it pretty clear in the illustration that He wants our lives to bear fruit. In fact, as soon as He tells us that we are the branches, He announces, *If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.* Paul once said it a bit differently, *We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). Yes, God wants to see works of faith, fruit in the lives of a Christian.

But perhaps we should ask Luther’s question at this point. What does this mean? What does God want to see evident in the actions of my life? The Apostle John is famous for his radical love of God. Not our love for God but God’s love for us (1 John 4:10) which set self aside that we might be His forever. Self-sacrificing love marks the child of God. So what is the fruit present in the life of the Christian? Perhaps it’s the husband who, listening to God’s Word, is willing to set his desires and wants aside for the sake of His wife. Maybe it’s the mother who lovingly sets her own needs aside to address those of her family. Perhaps it’s the young man or woman or not so young man or woman who is willing to sacrifice popularity or status to stick up for another. Maybe it’s just giving up our time to serve our God and spread His Word as we use the talent He has given to enrich worship, beautify the building we worship Him in, or teach the next generation of the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. Of course, it can even be as easy as setting aside some time to gather with our fellow Christians in worship, as God serves us, even as we enjoy the often forgotten encouragement our very presence can bring.

When fruits are present, in our lives, well *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* When my life shows the evidences of God's grace, the fruit of work done for Him, well it demonstrates to the world that I am His!

Of course, if my works demonstrate such a truth, a lack of them, well, *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.* Those words of course are terrifying. Especially when we realize the amount of times we have not only failed to produce the good fruits of God but produced the worm-ridden wicked and rotten fruit of sin. When I strive to live for God, and once more find myself crumbling under the weight of the Law. This picture of vine and branches continues to bear fruit for us.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain 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. God knows we need Him, require Him, are utterly lost without Him. Maybe vines aren't our thing, but we certainly have trees in abundance. Snap a branch from a tree and what happens? It is reduced to firewood. It requires the tree to grant it life, sustenance, even it's very being. Without the tree, it can't bear fruit anymore than it can claim life.

So intimately connected are God's people to their creator. I'm His and He's mine. I need Him. Imagine, for a moment how the branch would refer to the tree. Would it not call it mine, not unlike the child claims its parents. Truth is, the tree does not belong to the branches but the other way around. The child is a gift of God for the parent, it does not own them.

Of course, the branch cares for none of this thought process anymore than the child does. Mine for the child is a term of endearment. The branch is so intricately connected to the trunk of the tree that the two of them grow together, with and from each other. This is how our Savior would have is be with Him.

When a plant begins to struggle, it needs attention, pruning, care, for the gardener. When I struggle in my life to produce fruit filled with the grace of God, it's time to return to the one who pours out Grace to His people. I do this not through fancy mantras or quests for self-awareness. I need to run to the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. In Baptism, I am reminded of who I am. Baptized into Christ, I am a child of God, an heir of heaven and branched grafted lovingly to the vine through faith. In the Law of God, dead limbs are removed, and health branches are pruned that their energy might be directed to the fruits of faith which flows so abundantly through them in the Gospel of our Savior Jesus and the love He showed us on the cross. Dying there, even for me and my worm-ridden, wicked and rotten fruit which turns to selfishness rather than the selfishness Christ displays for us. In the Holy Supper, strength is pumped into weak limbs thrashed about by the winds of the world around us as we receive Jesus' very body and blood, yes, the actual body given for us and our salvation, the actual blood poured out for us that we might be saved even as it is miraculously in, with, and under bread and wine.

His Word cleanses and prunes. His means connect us to Him. It's all to God's credit. So Jesus said, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain 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.*

Jesus' I Am Statements have long been treasures of the church. *I am the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Gate, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am the Vine.* In each of them, as we learn about our Savior, we learn about ourselves. Today, Jesus says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches."* And the church bursts into song, *As the branch is to the vine ... I am His ... may my life show evidences of His grace. And He is mine ... may I remain connected to His Means of Grace.* Amen.