

“I AM . . . the Vine!”—John 15:5-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “I AM . . . the Vine!”, is John 15:5-8 → *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. 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. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

If you don't use it, you lose it! This phrase rings true in so many areas of discipline in our lives. When people encounter the “learning curve” while using a computer they find it difficult to perform a function months later because they haven't had to use that technique regularly. When's the last you had a struggle entering a contact into your cell phone because it had been so long since you had done so? Think of all the knowledge you acquired in all those years of schooling. I think of the people who kept all those books from college

only to use them later as booster seats for their children because Sear & Roebuck and the phone company quit publishing a catalogue. It is only that which is used in your everyday routines that you actually remember.

In one sense Jesus applies this same principle to our spiritual lives in the text before us. He used the picture of a *vine* and its *branches* to describe our relationship to God as well as our growth and the fruit of good works which are produced in that relationship. He says in verse 5 of our text: *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.*

It is important to recognize to whom Jesus is referring in His description. In John 15:2 He refers to *every branch in Me*. He is speaking about Christians, those who live in a faith relationship with Him. He is speaking about you and me. However, just because you claim to be in Christ doesn't mean that you are automatically connected to Him in a proper faith relationship. It is possible for a Christian to ignore his connection to Jesus **as He defines it** and lose his life eternally. This is the gist of Jesus' words in Mark 16:16 → *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* A living and active faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ connected with baptism saves you. Notice the present tense:

- *Whoever believes . . .* refers to **continuing in faith**, not simply having

believed at some point in your life.

- . . . *And is baptized* . . . Notice it doesn't say "and has been baptized" at some point in your life. You are baptized so it will be displayed **at this moment in your life!**

It is for just this reason Jesus says in verse 6 of our text: *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.* Notice the serious consequences for those who claim to be in Christ but refuse to *bear fruit for Him*. He is describing the judgment of hell—being eternally cut off from God. Claiming to believe in Jesus yet refusing to stay connected with Him according to His written Word is living with apathy, complacency and a false sense of security. Jesus put it this way in Revelation 3:15-16 → *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.* Your works are the fruit showing whether or not you are connected properly with the Lord Jesus Christ.

How does such disconnection with Jesus happen? The devil is constantly striving to get a foothold in your life to discredit faith in Christ **as He defines it in His written Word** and get you to claim faith in Christ **as you want to define it**. It happens when you lose connection to Jesus, *the Vine*, by ignoring

His means of grace in your life. Scripture tells us that the means through which Jesus graciously gives us His forgiveness of sins is through the Gospel (cf. Romans 10:17), through baptism (cf. Acts 2:38-39; 1 Peter 3:21), through the Lord's Supper (cf. Matthew 26:26-28) and through the absolution (cf. John 20:23). Refusing to partake regularly of these means of grace denies your identity in Christ by refusing to give these means of grace as well as receive them for yourself.

Disconnection with Jesus happens with refusal to admit and confess your sin of self-righteous security, the rampant idolatry which fills your life and taking advantage of His grace to indulge the sinful nature. This is why we are commanded in 1 Peter 2:16 → *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* Jesus has freed us up from the power of sin to serve God as we stay connected to Him, the Vine. He is your life source in every way!

God's desire for us is to produce more and more fruit, more and more good works which bring people to Him. *We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* (cf. Ephesians 2:10) Thus, as we do bear fruit God is going to prune us, cut us back so that we will be even more fruitful. (cf. John 15:2) This is a rather strange concept for most people. He continually prunes us, cleanses us through His Law & Gospel to keep us constantly living in repentance and

forgiveness, allowing us to experience various trials so that we may grow in faith and good works. James 1:2-4 describes this process: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Staying connected to Jesus as your **complete** Life Source, **both** physically and spiritually is essential.

As you stay connected to Jesus through His Word, prayer and living in His sacraments you will recognize His purpose for your life—to *bear much fruit*. You *bear much fruit* . . .

- . . . by trusting completely in Him as your eternal and earthly Life Source Who works His salvation in you. Philippians 2:12-13 tell you to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.***
- . . . by reading His Word everyday to be nourished by Him for the purpose of living in service to Him and glorifying Him in every area of your life! *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.* (Verse 8)
- . . . by receiving forgiveness of your sins through His means of grace regularly with the gathered fellowship of believers.

- . . . by depending upon Him and submitting to Him in prayer.

Jesus is *the Vine*—our eternal and earthly Life Source. We are *the branches*—those who have no life apart from Him. Sever a vine in your garden and just watch how quickly the severed leaves wither and die. God is *the Vine-dresser*—the One Who cares for you that you may have His Life and bring that life to others! Living this proper relationship between Jesus and yourself means that you recognize the fruit producing happens **on His terms, not your terms!** Thus, we desire more and more of His pruning and fruit producing activity in our daily lives!

Actually, the picture which Jesus gives in this text reinforces His being the great I AM in your life. The constant connection with Him at this present moment of your life bears witness to His promise: *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* (cf. Matthew 28:20) Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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