

Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2024

QUESNEL

“Branches, Abiding in the Vine, Bearing Fruit” (John 15:1-8)

In the Holy Gospel for today, in John 15:5,

- our Lord Jesus says to us:
 - *“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.”*
- And so our theme this morning:
 - “Branches, Abiding in the Vine, Bearing Fruit.”

And those will be the three parts of our message today.

- First, branches:
 - How do we become branches?
 - Second, abiding in the vine:
 - How does that happen?
 - And third, bearing fruit:
 - What does that look like?
- We will approach the word of God
 - in John 15 to learn.

First, branches:

- How do we become branches?
 - Now right away,
 - this sounds ridiculous.
 - How do you “become” a branch?
 - Either you are or you are not.
 - And that is the point.
- You cannot make yourself into a branch.
 - We start this life as dead sinners.
 - We are not living branches.
 - We had lost our connection to God,
 - the source of life.
- We sinners have cut ourselves off from God,

- and we can not glue ourselves back on.
 - We had no living connection.

Now I'm no expert on horticulture,

- but as I understand it,
 - if you try to graft a branch onto a vine or tree,
 - there has to be some sort of a match.
 - There needs to be a genetic similarity,
 - a certain amount of relatedness.
- And, of course,
 - you need to have a living branch to graft.
 - A dead branch just will not work.
 - So this is the problem for us.
 - How can we sinners
 - dead sinners, to boot
 - get ourselves connected
 - to the living, righteous God?
- **We** can not do it.
 - The graft would not take.
 - The Lord would reject us outright,
 - and rightfully so.

No, to become a branch,

- a living branch,
 - God Himself must do the connecting.
 - And here is how He does it.
 - First of all,
 - Christ has to cleanse us
 - to make us compatible.
- Our sins have to be removed,
 - cleansed away,
 - so that we are not rejected.
 - And this is what Christ accomplished
 - just a few hours after He spoke
 - the words of our text.
- It was on the night He was betrayed
 - that Jesus spoke these words to His disciples.
 - Then they went out to the garden of Gethsemane,
 - where Jesus was betrayed,

- arrested,
 - and brought to trial.
 - The next day, Good Friday
 - that was when Jesus paid for all your sins,
 - and the sins of the whole world.
 - He was nailed to a cross
 - and died there in our place.
 - He did this for you!
 - Jesus, the holy Son of God,
 - took the punishment
 - due for sinners.
 - He shed His holy blood
 - to cleanse us from our sins.
 - His perfect righteousness is credited to us.
 - And this is what makes us compatible,
 - clean,
 - acceptable to God,
 - and not rejected.
 - It is because of Christ.
 - The gospel of Christ declares it,
 - and we believe it.
 - *“Already you are clean*
 - *because of the word*
 - *that I have spoken to you,”*
 - Jesus tells His disciples.
- Christ’s gospel word is powerful,
 - and it does what it says.
 - His word cleanses us
 - and makes us alive.

In Holy Baptism,

- God connects us to Christ.
 - We are joined to Jesus
 - in His death and resurrection.
 - Now we baptized believers
 - are living branches,
 - connected to the vine,
- Jesus Christ,
 - by God’s gracious doing.
 - It is this Christ connection,

- the vital vine connection,
 - by which we become living branches.

Now that we have become branches,

- the thing now is simply to remain
 - connected to the vine.
 - This is our second point:
 - Abiding in the vine.
 - Branches draw their life from the vine,
 - so it is vital,
 - absolutely vital,
 - that we abide in the vine.
- “*Abide in me,*” Jesus says,
 - “*and I in you.*”
 - *As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself,*
 - *unless it abides in the vine,*
 - *neither can you,*
 - *unless you abide in me.*
 - *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.”*

There is no life

- or fruitfulness in us
 - unless we remain connected to Christ.
- Apart from Him,
 - we can do nothing.
 - If we do not abide in Him,
 - if we let ourselves get disconnected
 - from the vine,
 - then our source of life is lost,
 - and we die
 - and are doomed to hell.
- That is what Jesus says:
 - “*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.”*

How do people get disconnected from Christ?

- Well, you have got the devil,
 - the world,
 - and your own sinful flesh tempting you,
 - pulling on your emotional connections
 - to this world,
 - trying to break your connection to Christ.
- Loosen that connection,
 - and pretty soon you are in danger
 - of coming detached.
 - How does the disconnect happen?
 - It happens when people distance themselves
 - from the Word of God
 - found in the church,
 - when they stop coming
 - to church regularly.
 - Then they are in real danger,
 - serious danger,
 - of their faith being weakened.
 - There are a couple of old
 - yet somewhat true adages about this.
 - Seven days without God’s Word makes one weak,
 - w-e-a-k.
 - The more you miss church,
 - the less you miss church.
 - And that is a dangerous thing.

The disconnect happens

- when you let the devil whisper in your ear,
 - saying you do not need God,
 - you can be your own God.
 - But that’s how Adam and Eve got into trouble,
 - was it not?
- The connection gets loosened
 - when we let the world around us
 - draw us away from God,

- away from Christ and His church.
 - Other things become more important to us.
 - And so the branch loses its connection
 - to the vine,
 - it stops bearing fruit,
 - and it dies.
 - All that is left
 - is for the dead branches
 - is to be tossed into the fire
 - and burn.
 - That is a dreadful prospect.

But God does not want that for you, my friends!

- This is why Jesus is speaking these words to you today.
 - Christ wants you to abide in Him.
 - Abide in the vine:
 - This is God's good and gracious will for you.

OK, so how does that happen?

- How do we abide in the vine?
 - Simple:
 - By staying connected.
- Be where the life source is,
 - and that is wherever the Word of God
 - is preached in its truth and purity
 - and the Sacraments
 - are administered
 - according to Christ's institution.
- This is how you draw your life from the vine.
 - Christ feeds and nourishes you,
 - supplies you with the vitality you need
 - to sustain your faith
 - and make you productive.
 - He does this through
 - He does this only through
 - His gospel means,
 - the means of grace.
 - Sermons, Bible classes,
 - preaching and teaching,

- the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood,
 - meditating on God's Word in your daily life
 - through these means,
 - Christ the vine supplies us with the grace
 - we need to keep going and
 - and to be fruitful in our life.

Which leads to our third point:

- Bearing fruit.
 - First was becoming branches.
 - Second was abiding in the vine.
 - Now third is bearing fruit.
 - *"Whoever abides in Me and I in him,*
 - *he it is that bears much fruit,"*
 - our Lord tells us.
- *"By this my Father is glorified,*
 - *that you bear much fruit*
 - *and so prove to be my disciples."*
 - Think about how a branch on a fruit tree
 - bears fruit.
- Does it do so by trying extra hard
 - and resolving to really do a better job
 - of producing fruit from now on?
- No.
 - All the branch needs to do is to stay connected to the vine,
 - and it will naturally produce fruit.

Now to be sure,

- from time to time
 - the vinedresser will come around
 - and prune the branch,
 - so that the deadness is trimmed away.
- Thus the branch becomes even more fruitful.
 - From the branch's perspective,
 - the pruning may seem rather painful at the time,
 - but it is for the branch's good.
 - And so Jesus says,
- *"Every branch that does bear fruit*
 - *He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*

- This describes how God works repentance in our life.
 - It may be painful at the time,
 - but it keeps the deadness from setting in
 - and taking over.

The thing about a branch bearing fruit

- is that it does not have to do anything strange or unusual
 - in order to bear fruit.
 - It just comes naturally
 - when the branch draws its life
 - from the vine.
 - It bears fruit.
- There is that vital vine connection again.
 - It is the key to our being fruitful.
 - Abide in the vine,
 - and you will bear fruit.

What kind of fruit are we talking about?

- What does it look like?
 - The big thing that Jesus has been emphasizing to his disciples
 - is that they love one another.
 - This is the kind of fruit Jesus' disciples will produce,
 - that they love one another.
- This means you and me
 - and our congregation,
 - that we love one another.
 - How we speak to one another.
 - How we care for one another.
 - How we look out for the brother or sister
 - who is hurting,
 - physically or emotionally.
 - How we reach out to the one
 - who is missing from our fellowship,
 - to the one who is weighed down with sin
 - or guilt
 - or depression
 - or distress.
 - This is love.
- Love moves from thought into action.

- Where is the brother or sister who is in need?
 - What are his or her needs?
 - How can I help?
 - How can we help?
 - This is what it means to love one another.

Again, the Christ connection is key.

- As we are connected to the vine,
 - Jesus Christ's love flows into us,
 - and then flows out through us to others.
- *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. . . .”*
 - *for love is from God. . . .*
 - *In this*
 - *the love of God was made manifest among us,*
 - *that God sent His only Son into the world,*
 - *so that we might live through him. . . .*
 - *Beloved, if God so loved us,*
 - *we also ought to love*
 - *one another.”*

Beloved,

- this is the fruit of love that we branches,
 - connected to Christ the vine,
 - will bear.
- We are those living branches,
 - and our fruitfulness comes from abiding in the vine.
 - It is the vital vine connection,
 - begun in your baptism,
 - nurtured in God's Word and the Sacraments,
 - blossoming in love,
 - and producing much fruit.
- Branches that abide in the vine will bear fruit.
 - *“I am the vine,”*
 - Jesus says to us today,
 - *“you are the branches.*
 - *Whoever abides in Me and I in him,*
 - *he it is that bears much fruit.”*

Beloved, Love one another

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on April 28, 2024 the day we celebrated the 5th Sunday of Easter. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.