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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
April 24, 2016  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 5:1-7; Revelation 3:7-11  
Hymns: 2; 408; 398; 48 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

<sup>9</sup>“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

<sup>11</sup>“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Tending the garden.

Spring is here. Denise and I were out yesterday working in the garden. Yes, it is a bit early to plant most things, but there is work to do. We harvested some fresh asparagus, and worked to keep down the weeds in the asparagus bed. We dug around the rhubarb and fertilized and watered, eagerly anticipating our first rhubarb desert or sauce perhaps by the end of the week. We expect that these perennials along with the different berries we have planted to produce. There is a great deal of pruning to be done in the blackberries and raspberries!

Sometimes when we make the best efforts we are still disappointed. If that disappointment continues year after year, we dig up those plants and start new in a different spot with new plants. There is really no point in allowing the plants to take up space while we waste our efforts and resources on them. However, some things suffer from neglect. We have a couple of grape vines out there but I’ve neglected them. The result of that neglect is that they

have done nothing. They aren't growing well, and they certainly aren't producing any grapes.

The Lord tends His vineyard with great care. The Lord, who has invested a great deal in us, expects us to produce fruit for Him. That doesn't come naturally. We draw the strength to produce from our Lord and Savior. In our text the Holy Spirit uses this picture from the vineyard so that we might understand the dynamics of faith and life. Our text presents us with this picture that --

**THEME:** Jesus Is the Vine that Brings Life to His Branches.

## **I. Benefiting from the Vinedresser's Work**

Jesus said:

**John 15:1-4** "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Jesus taught a very important lesson with these words. He makes it clear that God worked among us to bring us into His grace, to make us a part of His "vineyard." From the outset we see that this is a work of God's grace. These opening verses of our text may not always sound so gracious to us, but it is a demonstration of God's grace toward us that He sent His Son into the world that we might have a life-giving connection to God. Jesus is the vine. Jesus is that connection to God. We are the

branches. We have been brought into this connection with Christ, and by that connection to Christ we have been saved; we have been granted power to live spiritually. Our life comes to us from the Jesus every bit as much as the branches of the grape vine draw their life from the vine. It is the grace of God that brought us into this vital connection with Christ that has made us alive together with Christ.

So the grace of God continues to be present with us as we make our way through this life. God tends His vineyard. God cares for the vine. If there are branches that have become no more than dead wood, branches that are totally unproductive, they need to be removed for the health of the vine. God prunes them out. This doesn't sound very gracious. In our minds we would have them stay in place even if they are detrimental to the rest of the plant and even harm the other branches. That is where the grace comes in. God preserves the plant and the health of the rest of the branches when He removes the dead wood.

But what of the next statement that those branches that are fruitful are going to be pruned as well? They aren't being cut out, but they are being trimmed and tended. It is one of the most difficult things for our natural minds to grasp that when those difficult trials enter our lives it is not God venting anger, or punishing us for some transgression. You see it is so obvious to us, (at least it should be) that we deserve nothing but punishment from the Lord that we set our minds to expect that rather than grace.

What is not obvious to the human mind is that the Lord deals with us according to grace and love, even in the difficult times, even in the trials. This is not the Lord's

way of “getting even.” This is not the Lord’s way to remove our sin or guilt. We are already clean because He has come to us in His Word. We have been justified by grace through faith. What the Lord is doing is strengthening the connection to the Vine. The Lord is leading us to grow tighter to the Vine for the support we need to produce fruit.

By God’s grace we are--

## **II. Tapping the Vine’s Strength for a Fruitful Life**

**John 15:5-8** “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Jesus brings us back to the basic connection that we might understand the source of all the good that we do in life. I bear fruit only because of my connection to the Lord who saved me from sin and death. As long as we abide in Jesus we will be fruitful, we will produce those fruits of faith that glorify our God and Savior. God’s purpose for us was to deliver us from sin and death. Doing this God made it possible for us to serve Him. It is not us. It is the Lord as Paul write in --

**Ephesians 2:10** “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God made us what we are. He set our hearts right. By His grace we are redeemed children of God who have new lives that have been created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works that glorify our Savior. We don't have to go out looking for these works. The Lord puts them right in front of us in this life. They may very often be the simple acts of love that we hardly notice, but they glorify the Lord as He has us walk in them. This happens as long as we have that connection to the Lord, the vine from whom we draw our strength.

If we break that connection we will become unfruitful. If we break that connection we will wither. Jesus makes it clear that the connection is maintained by His Word abiding in our hearts. As we live in the Word we will grow in grace and faith. As His Word abides in our hearts, we have access to the Father and that throne of grace. We have access to the help we need in every situation in life. The Word of Christ dwelling in our hearts is a great source of comfort and strength to empower fruitful lives. Stay in the Word so that the Word may stay in your hearts. Without that connection to Christ through His Word we will wither and ultimately become not only less fruitful, but unfruitful, and be cut out and cast into the fire.

No, that is not our desire. Rather we would spend our lives --

### **III. Strengthening our Connection with the Vine.**

**John 15:9-11** “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup> “These

things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.”

It all began with the Father’s love. God loved the world so much that He sent His beloved Son into the world that we might live through Him. God’s Son loved this world so much that He willingly offered Himself up for us as an offering to God; He ransomed us from sin and death. He provided a righteousness for us so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us through faith. Jesus’ love abides in us through this faith so that we willingly and earnestly desire to keep His commandments. This is how we might honor that love of Christ, and as we live according to His will, His holy and gracious will, we show forth His love to the world.

The Lord’s desire for you is joy. He wants your joy to be full. We don’t really comprehend fullness of joy. We think of happiness instead of true joy. We think happiness and joy as temporary and superficial. We can smile and laugh, but inside we may be tormented. The Lord turns that completely around. He enters our hearts with His joy, and on the outside we might be pretty miserable enduring hardship, pain, grief, persecution. There is a lot of tribulation in this life, but with Jesus in our hearts the joy is still there. Jesus brings us the assurance of God’s peace, and the hope of everlasting life where all the sorrows and tears and tribulations of this life are passed away. Already now we know the glory of a loving Savior who has drawn us to Himself, and given us life. He stays connected to us in all our ways so that we might bear fruit to the glory of His name, bringing true meaning to our otherwise mundane lives. Jesus is the Vine and by His grace we are branches connected to that

vine. **“So *we* will be *His* disciples”** (John 15:8).

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.