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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 2, 2021
4th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 3:18-24

Hymns: 411:1-5; 439; 433; 453:1,2

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

Sermon Text: John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every 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. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide 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.

⁵“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. ⁶If 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. ⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, our Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: We need to think about Jesus' place in our lives.

This is the consideration that Jesus was communicating to His disciples in the hours before His Passion began. In the weeks following Easter this is the lesson that we reinforce with the Scriptures for our own hearts and lives.

As we get caught up in the affairs of daily life, we find the business of life taking over in our minds and daily routine. To a degree this is unavoidable. We get up at a certain time of the day because we have things to do. We must go to work, or to the office, or we may have certain appointments that must be kept. Our minds are on these things. That is normal enough in life, but normal can be dangerous if the normal moves Jesus out of His proper place in our lives.

Jesus was well aware of this, and so addressed these important issues for His disciples before His visible presence would be removed. We particularly need this instruction because we have not experienced Jesus' visible presence in our lives, and yet His presence in our lives is more important than all the other things that occupy our minds and fill our days. May the Spirit move our hearts to treasure --

THEME: Our Connection to Our Living, Lifegiving Savior.

In our text Jesus is picturing --

I. The Vital Nature of This Connection.

We are all aware of the connection between and grape vine and its branches. Jesus was a carpenter, and His disciples were fishermen, or tax collectors, but they all understood the connection between a grape vine and its branches. They lived in wine country. It isn't that difficult of a picture. We can see it for ourselves in vineyards right around Austin. And so we easily grasp Jesus' message when He said: *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every 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. "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."* (v.1-2,5)

Grape vines are carefully maintained, and an important part of that maintenance is pruning. This pruning needs to be done properly. Weak branches that are no more than suckers will not bear good fruit. They will only draw strength from the plant so that the rest of the plant is less productive. Since this pruning is so important to the vine it needs an experienced hand, a master pruner. This is the picture Jesus lays before us, His disciples.

Jesus is the vine, and as such He is the source of life and strength for the entire plant. We are the branches. We draw life from the vine. Jesus made the important point of identifying the vinedresser as God the Father. Our gracious Father in heaven maintains the vine for the good of all. It does involve pruning. Some branches will be cut out for the good of the vine. Those branches that are unfruitful, unproductive, those branches that are merely suckers, those branches which are not abiding in Jesus' Word, they will be cut out. They will be cut out and they will wither and dry up. They will be gathered together and burned.

Let us stop right there for a moment. We need to understand that this can and will happen to branches that were attached to the vine. We need to understand that this is not a good thing for those branches that are pruned out and thrown on the burn pile. There is a hard and important lesson here for us to take to heart. We do not want to be among those branches that are thrown on the burn pile. We do not want any of our loved ones to be thrown on the burn pile. Jesus makes it clear that what makes the difference is abiding in Him, and to abide in Him means to abide in His Word. This is the opposite of neglecting Jesus' Word.

Every child of God knows the gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Most if not all of us were brought into this grace through the sacrament of baptism. That was the beginning of our connection to Jesus. For that connection to be maintained we need to hear the Word of God regularly and abide in that Word, that Jesus might abide in us, in our hearts, directing our lives.

We live in a world that disdains the gospel of Christ. We live in a world that places the allurements of wealth and pleasure before us all the time, every day. The world would lead us to regard these

material and temporal things as being the center of our lives to the neglect of our connection to Jesus. It is easy to slide from being vigorous and fruitful in faith to being among the unfruitful branches that are subject to pruning and to be thrown on the burn pile. It is important for us to maintain our spiritual wellbeing, and that comes not from within ourselves. We have no strength within ourselves, we have no life within ourselves. Life and spiritual wellbeing, and productivity comes from the Vine. It comes to us from Jesus. Jesus makes it clear in verse 7 of our text that **abiding in Him means that we have His Word abiding in us**. We need the Word. We need to stay in the Word. We need Jesus' Word abiding within our hearts. His Word is our connection to Jesus!

That is not the end of the pruning. The Master Vinedresser also works with the **fruitful** branches to make them stronger and more productive. Jesus said, *“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. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”* (v.2-3) Throughout the ups and downs in life, the trials we face and the tribulations we endure, our heavenly Father is working with us, shaping our faith, drawing us closer to Him, showing us His faithfulness. It all works to make us more fruitful as Christians whose faith *“shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.”* (Proverbs 4:18)

It is all about the gospel. Jesus' words to the disciples are words for us to hold on to as well. Jesus assures His disciples that we are already clean because of the Word which He has spoken to us. Jesus has come to us with the message of God's love and forgiveness. He came into this world to secure life and salvation for us with His perfect sinless life, a righteousness that is credited to us through faith. He washes us clean with His holy precious blood, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. This is the gospel message that connects us to Jesus and keeps us in His grace unto eternal life. This is the message we need to hear and believe and have abiding in our hearts all our days. Jesus is our living, lifegiving Savior who died for us and rose again and lives forevermore! As we grow in faith and this connection is strengthened by the Spirit through the hearing of the Word, we enjoy --

II. The Blessings Flowing from This Connection.

Of course, the first of these blessings is life itself! The branch draws its life from the vine. It cannot be otherwise! We are not talking simply of physical life which we all have from God, but rather spiritual and eternal life. Even as sin brought death, alienating us from God, so Jesus has brought us back to God so that we abide under His grace. We have peace and harmony with God and this spiritual life is also eternal. We will dwell with our Lord forever in heaven.

Now, during this life we enjoy the blessing of spiritual fruitfulness. Our life is given an eternal and spiritual purpose. Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”* (v.5) We might wonder exactly what the Lord is thinking of or looking for in our lives. We might wonder what it is that we should be seeing in our lives. We read in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* (Galatians 5:22-23) These qualities of faith reveal themselves in many ways in the Christian’s life, from loving the Lord and joining with others to praise His name in public worship, to simple words of kindness directed to those who feel trampled down, to a helping hand and a gift of charity to those who are in need. In all these ways we show the world our connection to Jesus. We are producing fruits of faith, again not by our power, not by our will, but because we are connected to the Vine. Without the Vine, separated from the Vine, we can do nothing. Connected to Jesus we bear fruit that leads others to see Jesus and comprehend the love of God in Christ for a sinful world.

This connection we have with Jesus brings us into God’s favor. Jesus said, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”* (v.7) We are invited to approach the throne of grace through Jesus. The Father hears our prayers and responds favorably. Our connection to Jesus with His words abiding in us, brings our will in accord with the will of God. Once we are brought into peace and harmony with God through faith in Christ, then our desires will be for the salvation of others, for the advancement of this salvation through faith in Jesus. This is the fruit our faith will produce as we seek

opportunities to glorify our God and Savior before this sinful world.

This glorifying of our God and Savior is a wonderful blessing in itself. *“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”* (v.8) For so many in this world life is all about “me!” Life is about what I want. Life is about what I achieve. Life is about others noticing me, and giving me the credit, or in other words the praise and glory that I deserve! Such a life is *“vanity and a grasping for the wind.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

Because we have this connection with our living and lifegiving Savior our life is no longer about “me!” It is about my God and Savior Jesus Christ. What I do is to the praise and glory of God. What life is about is being one of Jesus’ disciples. I follow Him, and show others the wonders of His grace, a grace that leads others to eternal life. The world doesn’t get it because this too is a fruit of **faith**. We get it and we rejoice in the privilege of living to the praise and glory of Jesus and our Father in heaven. We rejoice that our lives are about something bigger and better, far, far better than the passing vanity of “it’s all about me.”

Jesus is the Vine. We are the branches. This depicts the wondrous relationship, the lifegiving connection that we have with our God and Savior. May we cherish this connection and seek every opportunity to strengthen this connection by abiding in Jesus, and having His Word abide in us.

AMEN.

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