

Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 29, 2018
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

John 15:1-8 NIV

"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.

CONNECTED

Dear friends,

How do you stay connected? There are certainly lots of ways to connect with friends, family and business associates today. You can post photos on Flickr, pin something on Pinterest, text message, Imessage, Snapchat, upload a video to YouTube, tweet on Twitter, post on Facebook, make a connection on LinkedIn, spend time on Face Time, Skype, Zoom, call on your cell or home phone, blog on your blog, e-mail or even use the post office to deliver your letter. That's a lot of options, and I'm sure I missed some! I don't know how you feel about all of those ways to connect with each other but I must admit that I'm not really all that connected. I've got a phone, I text, and I do e-mail but honestly I tend to be a bit more private than many people when it comes to my social life.

Ultimately there's really only one connection that really truly matters. What's important as Jesus reminds us is that we are connected to him. **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.**

Through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit

Theme: You are Connected...

1. by the Word
2. to Christ
3. and his strength

In John's Gospel Jesus used a number of "I am" statements to describe the meaning of his relationship with us. Last week Jesus reminded us that he is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us. He is the shepherd and we are his sheep. The words of our text were spoken by Jesus to his disciples on the evening that he was handed over to his enemies to be crucified. Jesus knew that this would be a difficult time for his disciples. He understood that they would be tempted to sever their connections with him. That is why he had a lengthy heart-to-heart talk with them as they walked to the Garden of Gethsemane where he would be betrayed.

On that walk, he spoke of his departure and his glory. (John 13:31-32) He assured them that he was going to prepare a place for them and that he would come to take them to be with him. (John 14:1-3) He spoke of himself as the way, the truth, and the life saying, **"No one comes to the Father except through me."** (cf. John 14:6) He assured them that they would not be left alone and that because he lives they will live. (cf. John 14:18,19) He promised to send them the Comforter who would teach them all things and remind them of

everything he had said to them. (cf. John 14:26) He also commanded them to let their love for him show itself by obeying his teachings. (cf. John 14:23) Following all of this Jesus spoke the words of text to illustrate what it means to be connected to him in faith and love.

"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 (cleans) so that it will be even more fruitful.

At the time of Christ the vineyard and the vine was an important part of the culture of the Jewish people. Some of their coins had an image of a vine on it to represent the nation of Israel. There are many Old Testament references describing the nation of Israel as a planting of the Lord. Isaiah the prophet included the "vineyard" song in his prophecy that sang of the Lord's faithfulness to his people and the fact that they had not borne fruit for him. (Isaiah 5:1-2, 7 NIV) **I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2) He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit ... 7) The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.** Jesus' parable of the landowner who planted a vineyard and then went on a long journey reflects Isaiah's song. (cf. Matthew 21:33 ff.) It was a warning to the Jews of his time not to reject the one sent by the Father for their salvation.

When Jesus describes himself as the true vine and his Father as the gardener, he is contrasting himself with the fruitless nation of Israel who failed to glorify the Father. He alone would bring glory to the Father by growing branches that would produce fruit, which was pleasing to his heavenly Father. Like a master gardener, the Father does all that he can to gain an abundant harvest. He planted the very best – his holy sinless son – in his vineyard. And he carefully tends to his planting, removing fruitless branches that would sap the strength of the plant and make it weak and sickly. The healthy branches also receive his attention. Those he trims. He cleans off the sucker shoots and nips of the damaged ends so that these branches may produce even more fruit.

Speaking to his disciples Jesus assures them: **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.** They have been the object of the Father's special care. They have been connected to Christ through his Word and they have been carefully groomed, pruned, or cleaned to produce fruit that will bring glory to the Father. They were connected!

And through the power of the Word we also are connected to Jesus. We are connected to him through faith. We have been cleaned with the waters of baptism through the power of the word. The apostle Paul reminds us that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:26-27 NIV) **to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27) and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

The Word has brought us to faith and has kept us in the faith. We are connected to Christ. And through that connection we have become branches who are clean. The sin that made us unable to be productive has been taken away. The righteousness of Christ has been credited to our account. We are clean! We are in a position to bear fruit – to bring glory to our heavenly Father.

We have been sanctified by the Word of Truth (cf. John 17:17). By God's grace, we are **a chosen people ... a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** (1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

God has done for us exactly the same thing that he did for his people of old – the people who rejected his messengers and who ultimately rejected his Son! Jesus warns us to avoid following in the footsteps of

unfaithful Israel. We know that many in Israel tried to rely on their own strength, their own deeds, their own efforts, their own actions to earn the blessing and favor of the God. Jesus warns us not to make that mistake by stressing the importance of being connected to him and by describing the fate of the branches that are no longer connected to him.

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.

You are connected by the Word to Christ and to his strength. Without him and his righteousness, we are unfit and unable to do anything to glorify God. But, when we act in his name and in keeping with his will then our lives will be filled with much fruit. Our love for God will show itself in our love for each other. However, none of this has any meaning if we are separated from Christ because without Christ even our righteous acts are as filthy rags in God's sight. (cf. Isaiah 64:6) As Jesus says, "**apart from me you can do nothing.**"

Any branch that is not connected to the main vine will ultimately die. Jesus explains: "**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.**" Jesus seems to weave the imagery he uses so tightly to his application to our lives that it might be easy for us to overlook his warning and the sad spiritual consequences of falling away from him.

Let's pause for just a moment to remind ourselves that Jesus isn't talking about plants in this verse. He is talking about people who will ultimately suffer eternal destruction if they do not remain connected to him. They will be cast out (thrown away). They will have no hope, no strength, and no life. They will dry up and wither. They will be gathered up and thrown into the fires of hell.

We have become connected to Christ through the Word. But there is the ever present danger that we can become disconnected from him through our failure to use the Word. Jesus' parable of the seed and the sower reminds us of the temptations we can face in regard to his word.

(Matthew 13:18-23 NIV) "**Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19) When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23) But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.**"

The devil, the troubles of life, the worries, the pleasures, the treasures of life in this world are seeking to separate us from the Lord and his Word. That's why Jesus makes this promise to us: **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.**

These words once again remind us that we are connected by the Word to Christ and his strength. Those who remain in Christ will take his Words to heart not only hearing them but by believing them, putting them into practice and obeying them.

In Jesus' name, let us ask for the strength to love one another with the same kind of love that he loved us, a love that is willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of others as we reach out to them with the Word. In

Jesus' name, let us ask for the strength to resist the temptations which seek to rob us of our connection to Christ and his promise of eternal life. And finally, let us ask the Lord Jesus to remain in us and to strengthen our connection to him through the Word as he strengthens us for every task and every situation. (cf. Philippians 4:12)

Jesus and his strength and power are simply a "prayer call" away. Anything that we ask for in his name he will provide for us. Those who are connected to Jesus, whose desires are in keeping with his will, can boldly and confidently bring their prayers and requests to the Lord. And those requests will be granted to the glory of God the Father and the honor of Christ. **This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

Indeed the Father is glorified whenever sinners like ourselves are enabled by the power of the Word to remain in Christ and to live as his disciples.

To God Be The Glory (CW 399)

To God be the glory; great things he has done!
He so loved the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life an atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
Oh, come to the Father through Jesus the Son
And give him the glory -- great things he has done!

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son,
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our joy and our wonder when Jesus we see. Amen.