

Sermon - *"The Fruit of Christ"* - John 15:1-8

This week, we unfold the last of Jesus' "I Am" statements recorded in the Gospel of John. It was back in the book of Exodus when the angel of the Lord came to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush. When Moses went over to see why the bush was not burning up, God called to him from within the bush. Moses! Moses! God said to him, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later, Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites of Egypt? Moses said to God, suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

As the spring season gradually unfolds, I witness the buds filling the trees with life. This spring, I've been diligently tending to my tomato plants and flowers, ensuring they receive fresh air and sunshine each day and protecting them at night. I have hopes for more fruit this year. In today's passage, set against the vibrant backdrop of spring, John illuminates the relationship between Christ and his disciples, using the analogy of a vine and its branches. This analogy serves as a guide to Christian discipleship, revealing what Christ desires from us, what he does for us, and what God expects of us. In essence, God desires fruit! As Jesus states in the eighth verse, "This glorifies My Father, that you bear much fruit and proved to be my disciples." But what kind of fruit are we called to bear? We are called to bear the fruit of Christian character and conduct. Colossians 1:10-11 reminds us that we are to lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him as we bear fruit in every good work. If we have the Spirit of Christ living in us, then as we cling to the vine of Christ, he will produce Christlike conduct in us.

In this final statement, we can see that to bear much fruit, it takes two partners, each of whom must remain in the other. In reality, it boils down not so much to overall productivity and getting the job done but more to fruitfulness. Living a life that has meaning is a worthwhile life, but the most challenging part of that kind of life depends on four things from God to help us produce a harvest for him. He grafts us, He feeds us, He lifts us, and He prunes us. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus as the "I Am" and for the teaching of your Word. We pray, dear Lord, that you would help us to understand the meaning of "I am the true vine, and that we are the branches. Please speak to our hearts today, even in the midst of a chaotic world seemingly turned upside down. We pray for your peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Now, in the context of this passage, Jesus has just finished the final Last Passover Supper with his disciples. At the end of chapter 14, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away, and he says, I am coming back to you, and when it happens, you will believe. As they leave the Upper Room, he says to his disciples, "Come now; let us leave." In just a few short hours, Jesus and his disciples could pass through a vineyard, crossing over through the Kidron Valley to the other side at the Mount of Olives, where there stands the Garden of Gethsemane. I can see Jesus passing by the vineyard and the vines wrapping around the temple columns, thinking back to the prophet

Jeremiah and the Lord's promise of restoration to the house of Israel. Israel had become like the wild vine that bears poisonous fruit under the power of their unbridled desires and sinful lusts. However, we all know what happens there when Judas brings some Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus, eventually leading to the cross and his crucifixion.

Jesus always uses natural examples to illustrate his teachings. For instance, in the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as a vine that God planted, and in the literary context of Jesus' day, readers would have been familiar with the illustration of a vine. In parts of today's opening Scripture, Psalm 80 describes Israel as a luxuriant grapevine sending runners in every direction, indicating producing a bountiful crop. Keep that thought in mind. Israel was known for the lifeblood of its agriculture, and thus, the illustration of a vine was familiar to the people of that time, and the illustration of a vine is familiar to us as well.

Verse 8 is the cornerstone of this passage, for it follows the result of the vine's life in a twofold response. Jesus' redemptive work is in the way he glorifies the Father and reminds us of the main point: that Jesus wants us to be fruitful as His disciples. What does that mean, and how do we get there? Let us look at what the apostle Paul has to say in Galatians chapter 5:22-23. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things, there is no law." Notice that Paul does not use the plural of the word fruit, instead in singular form.

Therefore, what Paul indicates to us is that the fruit comes as a package, like a cluster of grapes attached to one branch. One fruit, not multiple fruits. The point being is that all of them are to be found in us as the believer. If one is missing, then we do not have the fruit of the Spirit." How are we doing? We know that a strawberry does not come ripe on the vine. First comes the flower, and then a sour berry appears, but if you leave it alone a little while and allow the sun to ripen it, it eventually fills out into a fullness of proportionate beauty with a rich flavor that delights the taste. Most likely, we could all stand a little ripening in our character traits of thoughts and actions so we can become more fruitful, not for personal success, but to become a people of value. So, how do we get there, and how do these qualities become more recognizable in our lives?

In chapter 15, Jesus describes himself as the vine. We are the branches, and God the Father is the vine-dresser or gardener. In verse one, he says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." What does he mean by the word "true"? Well, he is describing himself as faithful and true. Remember, when I read Psalm 80, I said that Israel has been referred to as the vine in the Old Testament. An entire chapter in the Book of Isaiah refers to Israel as the vineyard. Isaiah talks about God planting a vineyard and tending and caring for that vineyard, but when he looked to the vineyard for good grapes, all he found was a yield of wild fruit. Then, what happened was that God took away the vineyard's protection. In verse 7, Isaiah says, "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel." Thus, the disciples of Jesus would have been quite familiar with what Jesus was talking about, that the vine was in reference to the nation of Israel. Here, we see Jesus describing himself as the "faithful vine," and you, my disciples, are the branches of the faithful one. I am trustworthy and reliable. I am the one upon whom you can rely and trust. Now, Jesus is saying likewise. Now, I want you to be my followers on whom I can depend and trust.

How do we become more fruitful? First, we see in verse 4, “When we abide in Christ. And when he abides in us.” No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” Ten times in chapter 15, we see the importance of the word “remain,” meaning to persist or abide in one another in close fellowship. Therefore, there is no fruitfulness apart from Christ. The apostle Paul would say that apart from Christ, if we allow our flesh to dominate our lives. Paraphrasing Paul in the book of Romans, “nothing good comes out of my sinful nature. I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out because sin is living in me.” We must all, at cost, continue to humble ourselves and confess our sinfulness so that we can be fruitful in Christ. Any fruit, regardless of whichever fruit you choose, if it remains in the body of its life, will produce fruit.

Second, if we are not fruitful, God will not cut us off or take us away; he will trim us up, prune us, and cleanse us. Now, if we look at verse 6, we might find ourselves worried, but actually, the verse is quite beautiful and encouraging. “If anyone does not remain in me, he/she is like a branch that is thrown away, picked up, and thrown into the fire.” What John means is those who are not in Christ—those who are unbelievers- those who have rejected Christ. Remember I said, cleans us? A footnote for the Greek word for prunes is translated to “lift or to clean.” When we are down and discouraged, God lifts us off the ground. Go to a vineyard, and you will see vines trained to grow up some stakes and trellises to lift the fruit from the ground. Well, in ancient Israel, the vinedresser would tenderly lift the branch, clean it up, and tie it to a large rock so that the sunlight could get to the plant in order to grow fruit. The vinedresser was always looking for fruit. What we need to remember is that our good works will never get us to heaven. “For it is through faith and actions working together that will make us complete.”

We should realize that God the Father is constantly bending down beside us to see if our branches are hanging low to the ground to prop us up. He desires for us to be fruitful for his glory. Listen to what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 145:14. “The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts all who are bowed down.”

Finally, as we come to a close, verse 2 helps us see that when Christ prunes (or, in the Greek meaning, cleanses) us, we become more fruitful. “And every branch that does not bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit.” Are we living a comfortable life or a fruitful life? Let’s face it: pruning is painful. For us to be more productive, sometimes God has to take out his pruning clippers and take out all of the dead stuff. Sometimes, God takes off some of the healthy growth to cultivate additional life, to mature and grow higher to yield more fruit. You know this works if you have a vegetable garden or flowers. We trim off all the dead stuff so they will grow better. I wish it were the same when I shave my head so that more hair would grow. However, I realize that I have to have growth to cut back to make it more fruitful. However, pruning is good for our spiritual growth. It is a process, a process that takes until our life is complete. So, what does God need to prune back in your life that hinders your fruitfulness for Jesus? I know what he needs to prune back on me. And so it is, Friends, that when our lives are complete on Earth, and all is said and done, will we be able to answer the all-important question here on Earth and ever after? As the lyricist writes: There is just one thing that matters. Did we do our best to live for the truth? Did we live our lives for you? Did we live our lives for you? Jesus ends in verse 9, saying,

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”
Are we part of the vine or a barren branch? May each of us bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit
for God’s glory. Amen.