

DCF:

There are some plants that spread by sending out shoots under the ground. These shoots then pop up and begin to grow into a mature plant, but still connected to the original plant. Some of these plants are not wanted. Think of crabgrass, or creeping charlie. Some of these plants are wanted. You can think of a flowering bush or a grapevine. Those are the plants that produce desirable things, right?

25 years ago God’s kingdom sent out a little shoot to the southeast corner of Green Bay. For years believers had noticed that there wasn’t a congregation in Bellevue. For years believers had prayed and planned for a church to be planted. Ideas and proposals had been presented and rejected or delayed. But God had His own time table. In the early 90’s the Lord’s plan finally popped up in Bellevue. 25 years ago we saw the first evidence of “**MESSIAH’S LIFE VINE,**” our very first worship service. At that service, we focused on our gospel lesson. We heard that Jesus urges us to stay connected to Him and that Jesus will produce much fruit through us. Let’s hear it again, shall we?

### ***Part One: Jesus urges us to stay connected to Him***

Our Savior truly was a master of language. He used clear statements when needed. He also used word pictures when it would make a concept clearer. In the Gospel of John, we see our Lord use seven “I am” statements to embed some truth in our minds and hearts. Each one of those seven statements has one main point. This is the last of the seven “I am” statements. In this word picture, He reminds us that life sustaining strength flows only from Him through the Word. He is the source, the origin, the vine that we all need. <sup>5</sup> ***“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.”***

Now, this concept is easily understood by us. We know that if you cut off a branch of a tomato plant, it’s not going to live and produce tomatoes. It’s going to die. If you cut off a branch of your maple tree, the same thing will happen. Nature shows us that, right? If we want to keep our faith, we need to remain in Christ, connected to the Vine.

And why wouldn’t we? He grafted us into His body, the Holy Christian Church when He created a saving faith in our hearts. For most of us, this happened at our baptism. For some of us, it happened when we heard the good news of what Jesus did and the Holy Spirit created a saving faith in us. He did this so that we would have a future after this life. He did this because He loves us and wants us with Him forever. He did this so that we would have peace and hope as we traveled through this valley of the shadow of death. Remember last week? You know, Easter? He suffered and died to pay for our sins and rose again to show us and the world that the Father accepted payment for all our sins. He wanted us to take advantage of His sacrifice, so He gave us a saving faith. He made us part of the Vine, the Son of God, Jesus our Savior.

***“Remain in me”*** the Vine says. What happens if we don’t? <sup>6</sup> ***“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.”*** If we don’t remain connected to Jesus, our faith withers and dies. Soon, we’re of no use to anyone and you know what you do with dead tree branches. You either take them to the compost site on JJ or you burn them in a fall bonfire. Jesus wants us to remain alive and growing. He wants us to remain in Him.

So, how do we stay connected? Through the Word. We remain connected when we listen intently at worship. We remain connected when we read the Bible at home. We remain connected when we ponder what we read, not treating it like a job to check off our to do list. We remain connected when we talk about Jesus when the opportunity arises. Maybe someone this week will ask you if Jesus was real. Maybe someone will ask “What’s the purpose in life”.

Being connected to the Vine, connected to Christ through the Word, does some wonderful things. It is His strength that will cause our faith to grow. It is His strength that will calm our hearts and open our eyes to all His blessings. It is His strength that will give us peace and joy. Our connection to Christ will show in the fruit that believers grow.

## ***Part Two: Jesus will produce much fruit through us***

When we talk about fruit, we're talking about words and actions that glorify God. The stronger our connection to the Vine, the stronger our faith will grow. As we feed our faith with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit grows our faith. And, our stronger faith will grow bigger and better fruit to glorify the Lord.

But just like a good gardener, our heavenly Father will do a bit of pruning now and then. He wants us to grow in faith and action, to grow in our glory fruit. Sometimes He prunes our lives with painful events. He may allow a job loss or an economic downturn to prune away our increasing reliance on wealth rather than Him. He may allow health problems to prune away our increasing focus on the pleasures of this world. He may allow a personal crisis to prune away our sinful pride and let the fruit of godly humility grow.

He may do these things to prune us. But what He always uses to prune sin from our lives is His Word. Time and time again, as we remain connected to Christ through His Word, the Holy Spirit holds up God's holy will before our eyes. He shows us where we have failed. He shows us what is holding us back from living for Him. He shows us how we are to live, how to give glory to God. Truly, it is the Word, being connected to the Vine, that molds and guides us as we live for the Lord. That's what verse 3 is talking about when Jesus says to the disciples ***"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."***

God prunes us so we will produce. But remember, we bear fruit only because we remain connected by faith to Jesus.

Now, I know that tomato plants produce tomatoes. Apple trees produce apples. Pumpkin plants produce pumpkins. What kind of fruit do Christians produce? Well, as individuals, there's a veritable cornucopia, a smorgasbord, a buffet of fruit. Let me list a few, and see if some of the fruits are being produced in your life. There's the fruit of telling others about Jesus. Talking about Jesus with your children and raising them to trust the Lord. Being honest and caring toward others because we treasure our Lord and what He has done in our lives. Choosing good forms of entertainment. Being wise with our money and energy. Making sure we put Him first in any decision we have to make. Talking to Him daily in prayer. All of these are good fruits that develop when we stay connected to the Vine of Jesus Christ.

There are also fruits that we grow together as a congregation. Because of our shared faith, together we show the world our love for our Lord when we come regularly to worship Him here. Our songs of praise. Our support of missions and worker training. Our volunteering as Sunday school teachers, committee members, helping at church events and cleaning, welcoming visitors and serving as ushers, greeters, organists and singers. All of these are fruits that the Holy Spirit grows in our lives as we remain connected to the Vine. ***"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."***

Today we look back on 25 years of God's gardening here at Messiah. What does our fruit show? That we're good Christians? No. They show that God is a great gardener. He has grown us in spite of our sinfulness, apathy and selfishness. He has continually pruned us and strengthened us through His Word and poured some amazing blessings into our lives. In 25 years we have witnessed 351 baptisms, 326 confirmations, 99 marriages and 37 funerals. He has always been in our lives, loving and caring for us. None of this was possible if we had not remained in Christ, the true Vine. He gave us the strength and blessed us to produce the fruit that glorifies Him.

Today we thank God that He grafted us into His Vine by the Word. We thank God that He gave us the talents to use to produce fruit for His glory. We thank God that He gave us the desire to go and tell others about Jesus.

What does the future hold? God alone knows. But what we do know is this. As long as we remain connected to the true Vine, Jesus Christ, He will continue to strengthen us so that we produce fruit that will give Him glory. May God always keep us connected to ***"MESSIAH'S LIFE VINE."***

AMEN