

On The Bearing of Much Fruit

John 15:1-8

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

May 3, 2015 – Fifth Sunday of Easter



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. There's a portion of this morning's Gospel that's always bothered me – namely, the emphasis our Lord Jesus places on the bearing of fruit. It makes sense, of course, that if you're a believer there will be *some* evidence that faith is living inside – or to use the words of this text, there'll *some* fruit of faith in your life. But what really bugs me – or perhaps more accurately, what really bugs my Old Adam – is when Jesus says, in very uncompromising terms, that if you're a believer, you *will* bear fruit – *more* fruit – *much* fruit. These words sound so intimidating and demanding, in fact, that after reading them you might think it's time to take a close look at your own life – both to see how fruitful it's been, and to see what kind of fruit your life has been bearing – if that fruit has been mostly temporal and earthly, or eternal and heavenly.

You might also be inclined to look at the motivation behind what you do and how you live your life. Are the things you do done in such a way that the Father is always glorified? Are the things you do always done in a God-pleasing way? Will your achievements stand up to the examination of God, who is Judge over all? Might you also be tempted to use these words of Christ to scrutinize the “fruitfulness” of our Church? What sorts of things *have* we done for our Savior here – for what purpose – and to whose glory? Are the deeds we do done for the sake of our heavenly Father alone – or are they being done to bring glory to ourselves? These are the kinds of questions you might be tempted to ask when hearing these words of Jesus. But that *isn't* why Jesus said them – and if you think it is, you've completely missed the point!

These words are no call for self-analysis. In fact, in the entire eight verses of this text there is only *one* command – and it has nothing to do with bearing fruit, but simply states that as a believer you are to abide, or remain, in Christ. It's true, there *are* many *statements* about fruit, but only one *command*. In other words, there's only one command,

but many promises. And in every case, the One doing the work is God.

Jesus, then, isn't encouraging you to focus on the fruit of your life, but more importantly, on your connection with the Vine, who is Christ. Consider how a farmer doesn't have to focus on the crop itself when he wants to gain a harvest, but on the more essential matters that affect the size of the harvest. In one of Aesop's fables a story is told of a farmer, who, on his deathbed, told his sons about a treasure that had been buried in his vineyard. After the man died, his sons dug up and down the vineyard, looking for that treasure, but never found a thing. What they did notice, was that after all that digging the vineyard bore its best fruit in years. The fertility of the ground was the treasure. That and the increased yield of the harvest was what those sons gained as they tore up the ground looking for their father's treasure.

The point is, instead of concentrating on the amount and type of fruit your life produces, you ought to be looking to other things – the most important being that you have a firm connection to Christ, who is the only real, genuine, true Vine who can cause you to bear fruit. That's important to remember in this day when there are so many voices advocating for you to look inside yourself for the solution to every problem – when you ought to be looking outside yourself. Unlike the rest of God's creation, there's more to you than just your physical being. Though God created this world and declared it very good, He also created in you a need to rise above the world – a need to cling to something beside yourself. But you must be careful what you cling to – for only Christ and His Word can give you all that you need. Anything else will leave you dead and dying – dead and all alone.

Only Christ is the true, living, life-giving Vine. But, how can you remain connected to that Vine? Our Lord – not wanting you to go it alone – says that this happens when you remain in Him, and His Word remains in you. It happens through his Word as it comes to you written on a page, spoken into your ears, poured out over your body, or eaten as

bread and wine. Everything that belongs to you in Christ is tied together in this Word of God bestowed upon you in so many different ways. But there's something else you need to know about being connected to the Vine – something which isn't very pleasant, though vital. You know it as pruning. Of course you might expect a vinedresser to cut away and remove fruitless branches from a vine. But, it's not just the unfruitful branches that are cut, for even those branches bearing fruit have to be pruned. And whether you like it or not, even we who are in Christ must regularly be cut and pruned so that we might continue to bear fruit. But what fruit **does** God want you to bear? Well it certainly isn't something you do on your own power, for God is the sole Worker, and the fruit you bear is a gift from Him – not something you produce. It's what you're made of and who you are – and the way it happens is because of your connection to the Vine, Christ.

So, your connection to the Vine means every now and then you need pruning. If you've ever done any gardening, you know that if you want to good plants, good flowers, or good fruit, you have to cut off some of the extra growth off on your plants. In Christian terms, we might call that process "bearing the cross." Living as we do in Christ on this side of eternity means that you have salvation, a new nature, and a "new man" at work inside you. But the old man of sin is still hanging around, too – and he needs to be pruned, cut back, even cut off. The difficulty is that he's not just sitting there on the surface where it would be easy to get rid of him. No, the Old Adam has sunk his roots deep, down to the depths of your soul.

To make you more fruitful, this old man of sin has to be cut out. The tools God uses are many. First, He uses the Law, which, when you hear it cuts deep into your heart. It's only when the Law has done its work, has brought you to your knees in repentance, and caused you to abandon all hope in yourself, that when God is able to use the Good News of His Gospel, which comes to you in words, water, bread and wine – real, tangible, flesh and blood things – so that it might heal your wounds and make you whole and holy – so that when affliction, suffering and pain come – as you know they surely will – you'll be able to place your trust entirely in God for all things. Through these simple, ordinary means, God is able to accomplish His will in your life, so that you become wholly con-

nected to the Vine, who is Christ – and connected to that Vine, you might live and bear much fruit.

But what happens when a person tries to do this without Christ? Our Lord's answer is clear: "Without Me, you can do **nothing!**" "Nothing?" What about all the dazzling achievements of humanity through the ages, all the advances that have been made in the curing of disease, the mapping of the human genome, and all the accomplishments of man too numerous to mention? Does all that really count for nothing? In a sense, yes, because ultimately most of these accomplishments are connected with this world, and in the grand scheme of things – at least with regard to our standing before God – they are really quite insignificant.

What Christ is speaking about here are the fruits of the Gospel – eternal things, everlasting things, things that matter before God. "If anyone does not remain in Me," says Christ, "he's like a branch that's thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." Satan's plan, you see, is to cut you off from Christ, the true Vine – to keep You from reading God's Word – to keep You far away from Church – to keep you from regularly receiving the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood – and to keep you from praying and talking with God. And if Satan's plan succeeds, the result, for you, will be eternal death.

But when You remain in Christ, then you have everything. No matter what happens, you will be fruitful. The pruning will still have to happen. And you might even wonder about what kind of fruit God wants you to bear. There may be moments when your life even seems to be a complete failure. But when you're connected to Christ, God's promise is that you will have everything you need. Although the fruits of discipleship will often be hidden to you, God still sees them. Our God is the One who puts down the mighty from their thrones and judges the accomplishments of kings to be nothing. He is also the One who lifts up the lowly from their lowliness and says to the unclaimed, obscure believer who quietly abides in Christ: "You, My dear child, you have produced fruit, more fruit, much fruit." So, if you are a branch abiding in the true Vine, then you must know that Christ **is** at work in your life accomplishing all things for His good pleasure to the glory of His Father. Whatever that fruit might be – whether spectacular, hidden, impressive or obscure, that fruit is God's doing – and is therefore "much fruit." Amen.