

May 3, 2015
Sermon for Fifth Sunday of Easter
St. Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 15:1-8

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 15:1–8 (ESV)

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Grace, mercy, and peace from the one who touches our lives, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Most of us first encounter flowers at an early age. We see them growing in gardens and in the fields. A particular blessing that we have as Texans is that our state allows and even plants seeds along the highway thanks to the influence of Lady Bird Johnson, the wife of LBJ, Lyndon Baines Johnson, who was president in the early 1960's.

As elementary school kids, I remember sprouting and bring home daisy's and other plants in milk cartons.

Flowers are incredible plants. One of the most amazing things I remember about a particular plant is when I was transplanting a daisy plant with my grandmother, I accidentally broke one of the stems. I was upset because this stem had a nice bud on it and I was waiting for it to bloom. And now it was broken. I figured it was all over but my grandmother took a piece of ribbon we tied the stem back in place. I didn't believe it would work, but sure enough, in a few days, the flower bloomed. When that flower wilted, we pinched it off and another bud formed and it bloomed again. That ribbon kept the stem in place and attached to the rest of the plant. It received strength from the roots and the plant stayed plant alive all summer!

In our Gospel today, the Father prunes us as branches of a precious vine. He forgives our sins through the Word Jesus speaks to us. Pruned and cleansed, we bear new fruit as we receive spiritual life through Jesus' death and resurrection. That is to say, though, that the forgiven branches bear fruit.

You bear fruit because you are forgiven branches on the vine of Christ (vv 1–3).

You are branches on the vine of Christ. You receive nourishment from the rest of the vine, rooted in Christ.

In contrast to the world, Jesus describes His Church as a well-cultivated vineyard. Sometimes, for the good of the entire plant, the vine is pruned, cut and tied to keep the vine vibrant, alive and growing.

The sinful world is a wild and uncultivated vineyard. Wild branches produce sour fruit or no fruit at all. The sinful parts choke and steal nourishment and sometimes cut off or mislead branches that otherwise would have the opportunity to grow and produce good fruit.

For the Church, Jesus is the true vine; His Father is the vinedresser. God the Father loves Jesus with an eternal love. His love for the vine also extends to the branches.

You are those branches. As a vine provides what the branches need for life, Jesus gives life to you.

Without Him, you would be dead in your sins and doomed to everlasting death. By Baptism, you are grafted into Him so that what He has—life—flows to you. Sometimes the grafting is not what we would prefer. Sometimes we are the cause of our being cut and taped. God does not cause us to sin, but He works to save and fix us, again grafting us back into place so that we can grow and thrive, much like the daisy plant when I broke the stem. If we would have left it laying there, it would have just died, but since we grafted the stem back together to receive nourishment from the rest of the plant, the plant thrived.

Jesus declares that you who are on the vine, that is, in Him, are forgiven (“clean,” v 3).

Our forgiveness was won for us by Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross.

Then that forgiveness was given to us personally by the Word He has spoken. That includes our Baptism, the washing of water with the Word.

As forgiven branches, then, you do bear fruit. You’re fed from being attached to and being rooted in Christ. From there you produce the fruits.

The fruit Jesus is talking about includes: “... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*” (1 Jn 4:7–11; Gal 5:22–23).

This sort of fruit does not come from us. Our nature is sinful. This fruit is the natural result of being attached to and fed by Christ, the vine.

Jesus tells us to continue to bear fruit as forgiven branches by remaining on the Vine of Christ (vv 4–6). Branches that do not remain connected to Jesus, abiding in Him, simply cannot bear fruit and thereby...are useless.

Look back to our Text, what does Jesus say happen to the branches that are useless? “⁶ *If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*”

Cut off from Christ, we would again be as dead and doomed in our sins as we once were by nature.

This really can happen—our faith can die—if **we** separate ourselves from God’s Word, which is our connection to Him and His forgiveness.

Jesus warns us that branches that do not bear fruit are removed from the vine.

Branches that do not produce fruit prove that they are spiritually dead, no longer believers in Christ.

The Father removes such unfruitful branches, casting them into eternal fire as we just read in verse six.

But the Father also prunes fruitful branches so that they can be even more fruitful. Again our Text: ² *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*” (John 15:2, ESV)

Living branches that bear fruit only continue to do so when the vinedresser lovingly cares for them by pruning parts of the branches that are sick or dying.

The Father may, for example, allow, not cause but allow sufferings or disappointments that cause us to trust more fully in Him or cause us to direct our lives to spiritual things and away from earthly ones.

It doesn't mean that He has abandoned you, even if the sufferings are a direct cause of your actions. God the Father gives such meticulous care to you, branches attached to Jesus. He is with you through your sufferings, loving and caring for you. (Deut 31:6, Heb. 13:5-6)

If you continue as forgiven branches on the vine of Christ, you may be surprised by the fruit you bear. (vv 7–8).

Jesus says if we continue as forgiven branches by remaining on the vine, we will receive whatever we wish.

But what will we wish? Will we wish for selfish things? Or the things that are in accordance with God's kingdom?

We might be surprised! As we continue in God's Word, following Christ, our entire attitude and desires can and do change. We might truly be surprised at how our lives can change.

Jesus also says bearing fruit by continuing as forgiven branches reveals us to be His disciples.

A disciple listens to and repeats all that his Master speaks to him. A disciple comes to desire what his Master wishes.

Being Jesus' disciples, then, changes our wishes. Jesus' disciples really mean it when they pray, "The Lord's will be done."

Jesus' disciples know He has died for us on the cross and forgiven all our sins. Forgiven sinners delight in whatever is the will of the One who forgave them.

Surprisingly, that even includes those times God prunes us with sufferings as He shapes our lives for our own good, because the disciple believes God's will is always for our good and the good of others.

Then, yes, when we pray for the Lord's will—that now is also our wish that His will be done!

A daisy or any other plant that isn't cared for will soon be covered with dead leaves and blossoms. The beauty God intends will be replaced with death and decay.

Left to ourselves, our tragedy would be more than a dead flower. But we are connected to the true and living vine. Jesus nourishes us with His Word and Sacrament. In Him, we have forgiveness of all our sins, and we will live in His vineyard, as His children forever.

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds
through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory