

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Live a Fruitful Life

John 15:1-8

"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.

How would you respond if I asked you the question: "What kind of life do you want to live?" That's kind of a big question. It's one that makes you stop and think. I think after we take some time to think about it, we might come up with some similar answers to that question. I think most people want to live a life that has meaning in some way or another. People want to think that their lives are more than just getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, with some pointless activity in between. People want their lives to be fulfilling and satisfying. I think that in our Gospel reading today, Jesus gives us the key to living such a life. He speaks of himself as the Vine and each of us as branches. We find purpose and meaning in life the same way a branch fulfills its purpose in this world by living a fruitful life.

The first and most important part of living a fruitful life we find in the first verse of our reading. Jesus tells his disciples, "*I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.*" A fruitful life begins with a connection to the true Vine. What is it about a vine that Jesus uses in his comparison in these verses? A vine is something that is alive. A vine is also something that gives life to its branches. Jesus is the true vine as he is life and he gives life. Jesus is life in himself. As true God, he has existed from all eternity and he will exist into all eternity. There was never a time when he did not exist. When he took human flesh and lived on this earth, he lived life the way it was intended—in perfect harmony with God's will. Jesus is life. And Jesus gives life. That is what he came to this earth to do—to bring life to a world that was corrupted by sin. Adam and Eve had broken God's command and brought death into the world. Were it not for Jesus, that is all the people of this earth would know—pain, suffering and death. Jesus came to change that situation. By his innocent suffering and death he took upon himself the punishment for sin and paved the way for the people of this earth to once again experience life.

Living a fruitful life begins by being connected to the one who gives life—the true Vine, Jesus. The only way we can live a life that is fruitful and fulfilling is by realizing it is not about us. We can't have life on our own. We didn't give ourselves earthly life. We certainly can't earn our eternal life. We are completely dependent on Jesus. He created us. He redeemed us. We only have life when we are connected to him. Coming to this realization can sometimes be a painful process. It sometimes involves the Master Gardener doing some pruning. He prunes us when he allows suffering to come into our life. This is not to punish us or drive us away. It is rather to draw us close. He does this pruning because he loves us. He doesn't want us to die completely. There are some branches that die. Jesus said, "*[My Father] cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.*" These dead branches refer to those who once had faith, who were connected to the vine, but through their own wickedness and rebellion had fallen from that faith. They lost their connection, so they no longer had life. Clearly, this is not what we would ever want for ourselves. We would much more prefer the pruning. Though it can be painful, the end result is much better—life instead of death.

But how can we be sure that we have this life? How can we know that we are being pruned and not cast off into the fire? We can know this because Jesus tells us this in his Word. He said to his disciples, "*You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.*" We miss a play on words here in the English translation. The adjective "clean" and the verb "to prune" come from the same root. It's as though Jesus says to his disciples, "You are already pruned through the Word I have spoken to you." We can know the Father loves us. We can know that we have life through Jesus. This is what the Word says. And the Word has the power not only to bring us the message, but also to create faith in the life-giving gospel of Jesus. This is where a fruitful life begins. It begins by hearing the message and coming to faith in Jesus. This establishes a connection to the life-giving vine. Without that connection, our lives will never be fruitful. With it, we can know that true life—a life filled with peace, joy and hope—is really ours.

Living a fruitful life is more than just enjoying the spiritual blessings of Christ. A fruitful life is not just something internal. Living a fruitful life means just that—it is about the way we live. Our connection to the vine Jesus changes the way we live from day to day. As Jesus said, "*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.*" As we remain in Jesus through the Word of God, we bear fruit in our lives. The fruit are the God-pleasing works which we do out of love for Jesus. The love we have received from God is the love we share with each other. The path to a life filled that is fruitful and satisfying is paved with works that are pleasing to God. Our sinful nature might want us to fill our lives with works that bring us pleasure and seem like fun but are completely contrary to God's will. These kind of "fruits" are never satisfying. They leave us empty. They leave us wanting something more. But works done out of faith in Christ give our lives real meaning. When we show love, when we speak the truth, when we forgive others, when we help those who are less fortunate, when we build someone up instead of tearing them down, when we give freely and willingly to the work of the Lord—these kind of fruits make for a fruitful and fulfilling life.

It is fulfilling to live this kind of a fruitful life, but it is not always easy. We need help. Jesus offers us just such help. He invites us to come to him for aid. He says, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”* This is one of the blessings of a fruitful life. We are able to go to God in prayer and he hears us. Jesus tells us to ask what we wish and it will be given to us. In essence, he gives us a blank check. Notice how he begins the verse, however. He says, *“If you remain in me, and my Word remain in you...”* When our lives are lived connected to the Vine and we are rooted in the Word of God, we will ask for those things which are pleasing to God. We will ask for spiritual strength in our battle against the devil. We will ask for perseverance in the face of trial. We will ask that he gives us gifts according to his will. And these prayers he will hear and answer.

As we live this fruitful life—a life filled with the Word, with prayer, and with God-pleasing works—we ultimately give glory to our Father in heaven. Jesus said, *“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* When we return to the first question I asked: “What kind of life do you want to live?” Isn't this perhaps the best answer: “I want to live the kind of life that gives glory to God.”? After all, God is the one who has given us life in the first place. What better thing could we do then bring him glory through the way we live? What a wonderful thing it is when people look at us and see the love of our Father in heaven in the way we act and speak.

Today is Mother's Day. It's a day that we take time to remember what a blessing our mothers have been to us in our lives. So often in a mother's love are we able to see the love of Christ in action. By her unselfishness, by loving and nurturing her children, by disciplining them in line with God's Word, she shows herself to be a disciple of Christ. There is no greater mother than one who is connected to the Vine Jesus and lives a fruitful life to God's glory. May we all strive to live such lives in whatever roles God has given to us. A fruitful life connected to the vine is a life filled with meaning and satisfaction—not only here on earth, but forever in heaven. **Amen.**

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