

Fruit of the Divine

Text: Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-21 (Series B. 5th Sunday of Easter) Ps. 22:25-31

John 15:1-8

A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."

Prayer

When I travel on a plane, I am completely dependent on the expertise of the pilot and crew. I rely on those who design the airports and runways, the computers and navigational equipment on the plane. I am dependent on the skills of all those who manufacture and service the planes.

When I drink a glass of water at home, I depend upon the chemists who make sure our water is clean and the plumber who gets drinking water into the taps of every home in our cities and towns.

When I switch on a light, I rely on the know-how of contractors, technicians, and inspectors, and of a vast industry of specialists. We rely on doctors, nurses, the pharmaceutical companies, and the Medicare system to help us stay healthy.

When you think about it, we are dependent on so many people. We trust them to do their job so that we can live safe and happy lives. When we go out to eat, we trust that the chef is providing good fresh food. We know there are times when this has not happened, and people have gotten sick.

Michael, a helicopter pilot, was home on leave from an overseas mission and was sharing his story with friends all about the choppers he flew, often in very dangerous conditions far out at sea. He concluded by saying that his life and that of the crew depended on **one** bolt – the bolt that held the huge whirling rotor in place; he went on to say that the mechanics had named it the "**jesus** bolt." You can see why. Without the "**jesus** bolt," they would be doomed. Their safe return home depended entirely on this one single bolt.

That is a modern parable of what Jesus is telling us in the reading from John's Gospel today when he says, "*I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me*" (John 15:5). You don't need to know too much about gardening and plants to realize that a tree, shrub or any plant, as far as that goes, depends on the trunk and the root system for it to be happy and healthy.

A man once planted cucumbers in his backyard. He made sure that the ground was well prepared. He bought the best cucumber seedlings and planted them. To his delight, soon he had cucumber vines all across his back yard. The plants were green and healthy.

One day, as he walked through his garden, he noticed that some of the leaves didn't look as green as the others. Not many days later, some of the leaves were as good as dead. He followed the vines with the dead leaves until he got back to the main plant. There at the base of the main stem, he noticed that insects had almost eaten through the stem. The cucumber plant

was dependent on the main stem for water and nourishment. Life-giving juices flow from the main stem to the branches and enables delicious fruit to appear.

It's not possible to produce fruit without being connected to the stem. In a similar manner, as Christians, we need our true vine, Jesus Christ. When Jesus says, "*I am the vine, and you are the branches,*" he is talking about the very special relationship that exists between him and us, between you and me. We are dependent on him for everything we need in our daily life, from food, health, family and good friends to love, forgiveness, hope, comfort and eternal life.

Apart from him, we would be like the cucumber vine with its lifeless leaves. Without being joined to the main stem and roots, we would die. As Jesus said, "*If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you can't do anything without me*" (John 15:5 CEV).

When did this take place? At our baptism, when faith is professed in the name of Jesus Christ. We might say that when the water of baptism was poured over us, we were grafted into the vine, Jesus. We were intimately connected to him and have since received from him all that we need to sustain our lives.

We are connected to him when we come here to worship and when we hear his Word. It doesn't matter how much we think we know about the Bible or how many times we have read it; we need the life-giving nourishment that God's Word offers. As we read it and study it, God's Word offers us strength in the face of new situations.

We are joined to Jesus when we receive his body and blood in Holy Communion. We are refreshed and freed from the guilt of our sin. Our faith is strengthened as we are nourished through God's Word and Sacrament. If we didn't eat and drink every day, we would become sick and maybe even die. Likewise, as branches of the true vine, Jesus, we are kept healthy and alive because we are connected to the source of life. The translators of the New Testament have used various words to describe this connection. Whether we talk of 'abiding,' 'remaining,' or 'being joined,' one thing is clear; being connected to Christ is crucial. It is the only way to a complete and fulfilled life.

There are those who say that there is only one heaven with many different roads that lead there. Whether it's Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus or the latest guru in town, it doesn't really matter; they all point to the same place. It's okay to follow any of them. That's not what Jesus is saying.

"No one can get to the Father without him," (John 14:6) and he is the *only* vine from which the branches are nourished. Without the crucified and risen Jesus, the branches wither and die.

Jesus puts it so vividly, "*Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned*" (John 15:6). From the grape vine, we expect a crop of juicy grapes. And, likewise with us. Jesus is the vine, and we are branches and from the branches Jesus says he expects to find a lot of fruit.

To be joined to Christ, to be a branch that is grafted into the vine, Jesus means to "*bear fruit*". The kind of fruit that should be evident in our lives is "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit that we bear shows itself in very practical ways.

If we are joined to Christ, you cannot look the other way when someone is in need. As a branch attached to Christ, we don't hold back our forgiveness; we try to be understanding and helpful. We want to be encouraging, instead of being negative and critical.

Being connected to Jesus means that we will seek reconciliation instead of adding fuel to the disharmony. It means showing love and patience to those whom we think don't deserve it. In other words, being joined to Jesus has practical implications for the way we live our everyday lives.

Bearing fruit isn't optional, my friends. Showing love, care, forgiveness, commitment to Jesus, eagerness to worship and to hear God's Word, is a natural part of being a branch attached to Christ, the vine. But to have a good crop of grapes, it is necessary for the farmer to prune his vines. During my student days in Kitzingen, Germany, (Kitzingen is located in the Main River valley, a vine-growing area.) I was amazed at how ruthless the farmer is with his vines. I witnessed, on several occasions, how the farmer cuts off all of the unnecessary suckers and leafy branches, leaving a pile of dead wood on the ground alongside each vine. Pruning is essential for a good harvest. If the farmer doesn't prune the vine and get rid of all of the useless branches, the vine will look lovely and leafy, but the quality of the fruit will be poor, if there is any fruit at all.

Jesus is saying that all of the useless deadwood in our lives needs to be cut away. We may think this deadwood makes us look attractive, especially to the world, but it will not in anyway help us to bear fruit that will bring glory to God. To bear the kind of fruit that Jesus is looking for means to prune away all this foliage so that the Holy Spirit can cause real fruit to grow – the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, and self- control. None of this is easy. We find it easier to ignore people than to help them. It is so much easier to be hurtful and critical than to encourage and comfort someone. We can't do this kind of pruning by ourselves.

Jesus calls us to abide in him as he abides in us, joined to him as branches on the vine. We will bear much fruit if we seek to prune our inner deadwood to clear the way for new spiritual sprouting.

We need the Holy Spirit to help us cut out the deadwood of self-righteousness and to grow beautiful fruit. That's why it is ever so important that we are connected to the vine.

The fruit we bear is not for our own care and feeding ~ it is to be shared with others for their nurture and growth. As we, the branches, grow stronger, we draw together as brothers and sisters in a community of faith, hope, and eternal love, in and with Christ as our Vine, the Holy Spirit as our Guide to understanding, and God Almighty as our ultimate Gardener/ Vine-grower.

From the vine, Jesus, we receive the nourishment we need to live as his disciples. We receive the forgiveness we need for our failures; we grow in our understanding of what it means to be baptized persons in everyday living.

We are still in the Easter season. Because the vine lives, so do the branches. The vine gives the daily food and nourishment to the branches so that they can produce a lot of fruit. Likewise, the life of Christ flows to us though the Word and Sacraments.

As Jesus said, *"I am the vine you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit..."* the fruit of faith and good deeds. May the life-giving sap of Christ's love make us all fruit-bearing branches.

Amen.

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Wess Bourgaize, Johannes Eidnes, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen and family & COVID-19 patients, essential and frontline workers.*

Let us pray:

Living God, Eternal Vine-grower, prune detachment and sin from our hearts to cultivate strong, dynamic, and fruitful branches that flourish, not wither, as we abide always in You. We ask this through Jesus, our True and Perfect Vine; and the Holy Spirit, our Wisdom Guide; who together with You, live and reign as One God forever and ever. Amen.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Alleluia! Sing to Jesus # 392
- In His Temple Now Behold Him # 417
- O Living Bread from Heaven # 542

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