

5th S of Easter - rev. 4/28/24 SJ, SM

John 15: 1-8 (NIV) “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He 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. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Dear fellow redeemed,

When God called Moses to be the deliverer who would lead his people out of bondage in Egypt, Moses was afraid that the Israelites wouldn’t believe that God had chosen him and would ask for proof, that they would want to know God’s name. God’s answer was, **I AM WHO I AM. Tell them, I AM has sent me to you.**

The Hebrew name of God – Jahweh, Jehovah or however you want to say it – basically means “I AM” or “I exist.” With the words “I AM,” God was declaring that he had no beginning, no ending. God is the Uncreated, the eternal one.

The Jews understood this. When Jesus declared, **Before Abraham was, I AM**, they understood what he was saying. They understood Jesus was equating himself with God, declaring that he *was* God.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus seven different times taught us critical spiritual truths. Many of those I AM’s are extremely familiar to us. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd and the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Bread of Life and the Living Water. Today we hear Jesus teach us that he is the True Vine and we are the branches. Let’s study those words and see that means that:

The Branches Remain In Jesus

1. Planted in Jesus
2. Pruned in Jesus
3. Productive in Jesus

1. Planted in Jesus (vv. 1,4)

It all starts with Jesus. In Jesus we have life and outside of Jesus we cannot have spiritual life or gain eternal life. Jesus highlights these important spiritual truths when he teaches us: **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.**

This is a little different than the familiar picture of God’s Word as the seed, planted in our hearts, watered by Word and Sacrament, blessed by the Holy Spirit and made to grow, but it is very similar. Jesus pictures a plant that is fully grown, and he lets us know he is the plant, what he calls **the true Vine**. Jesus is telling us that this goes beyond a picture or a metaphor. He has the essence of a vine, giving life and nourishment to the branches.

Jesus is our source of life. It’s important for us to remain connected to Jesus. For years, the Kids’ Connection videos that our synod produces for our children end with **stay connected to Jesus**.

Today Jesus tells us to stay connected to him as well. **Remain in me, and I will remain in you**, he promises us. The disciples were already connected to the vine; they were already connected to Jesus for bonds of faith and love and trust. Jesus urges them and encourages them to always remain connected to him.

2. Pruned in Jesus (vv. 2,3)

Jesus even reminds us of why we need to remain connected to him: **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** We have many blessings in Jesus and through Jesus: peace of mind and heart, forgiveness of our sins, the hope of the resurrection and the promise of everlasting life. All of those blessings are ours in Christ, but outside of Christ, without Christ, we have none of those blessings.

After any big storm, there are often branches around. I know the last few weeks, there have a number of broken branches around our house and the churches, and there were more the last few days. Yet no one suggested taking those broken and shattered limbs, twigs and branches and trying to reattach them to the tree. In fact, even when a tree branch is broken but remains attached to the plant, the only choice often is to prune it, to cut it off.

God prunes too. Pruning is done to either improve the shape of the plant or create more fruitful growth. Years ago, my next door neighbor deeply pruned his apple tree. It had too many branches that were producing nothing but small, dinky little apples. The next year, the newly pruned apple tree produced the bigger apples that he had wanted in the first place.

The disciples were already connected to Jesus. Jesus points this out by saying, **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.** However, they had room to grow in their faith. We often see them stumble and fall into sin. Jesus wanted them to grow in their faith and Christian life.

Our heavenly Father wants us to be spiritual productive. He wants our lives to be filled with thoughts, words and actions that show our faith and reflect our love for him and for his Word.

Like the twelve disciples, we need pruning Like the disciples, we often stumble and fall. We cling to world things. There are feelings and attitudes living in our lives that we know are wrong, but a part of us – or sinful nature - wants to hang onto those sinful thoughts and attitudes.

We may want to keep them, but God wants to prune them. Our heavenly Father wants to prune away and remove every thought, word and action that subtracts, hinders or gets in the way of living our lives fully and completely for him. **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. Productive in Jesus (vv. 5-8)

Not only are we planted in Jesus and pruned in Jesus, but Jesus also wants us to be productive in him, as we remain in him and we **bear much fruit.**

I don't know of any gardeners or farmers who plant simply because they want to look at the plants. They expect something, they expect a harvest.

Likewise, our heavenly Father is a gardener who doesn't plant for the sake of appearance. He's interested in production. In the parable of the fig tree, Jesus talks about a fig tree that didn't produce. They pruned, but if it still didn't produce, it was going to be cut down. Jesus uses that same picture when he warns us about the fate of every branch that does not remain connected to Jesus: **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.**

Sometimes we think that we can do whatever we want to do. Yet Jesus says, **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.** Jesus didn't just plant trees, he planted fruit trees, trees that bear fruit, in other words, lives filled with faith and acts of faith. Perhaps we might recall the words of Luther that for all that God has done, we should thank, praise, serve and obey him.

Today Jesus reminds us how important it is for us to remember that he is the vine, the source of God's forgiveness, love and blessings. Without him, we have no life, no heaven, no forgiveness. The same Savior who gives us these blessings wants us to grow in our faith and love, so that less for this life and this world and more and more are lives are lived for Jesus and the life to come. Amen.