

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 2, 2015
St. John 15:1-8
Fruitful Branches Attached to the True Vine
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The house where I grew up was on two and half acres of land. We had a big garden and a small fruit orchard. There also was a decent size grape arbor behind the garage. I still can see in my mind its branches, heavy with dark purple fruit, hanging down from the vines.

As part of his work as a gentleman farmer, my dad would tend those vines and branches. Each year he would cut off the dead branches, and prune back the fruitful ones to make them even more fruitful. Later, my cousins and I would sit on the grass in the arbor's shade thoroughly enjoying the rich, ripe fruits of his labor.

This is how we are with Jesus. We are **Fruitful Branches Attached to the True Vine**. Jesus is the true Vine. Christians are fruitful branches.

The grapevine is the trunk through which the branches have their very life. Branches do not give life to the vine. All the water and all the nutrients pass from the vine to the branches. Jesus told his disciples shortly before leaving for Gethsemane, "I am the true vine," literally, I am the Vine, the true one."

My spiritual life that replaced my death in trespasses and sins comes only from Christ. Jesus has given me his righteousness and sacrifice on the cross with its benefits of forgiveness and salvation. Attached to him through faith, I have these and eternal life in heaven instead of eternal death in hell. Jesus does not want any of us to lose that connection. This connection is imperative, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you."

So long as we are attached to Jesus the true vine we are clean. The Greek work is catharsis. Jesus' righteousness is ours and we are holy in God's sight. On my dad's grape arbor, healthy strong vines made for healthy strong branches. Jesus is holy and gives us his holiness to cover our sins. That spiritual cleanliness comes through the gospel. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word." [5:26]

The human gardener helps the vine by cutting off dead branches that do not bear fruit. He helps the vine by pruning the fruitful branches which makes them even more fruitful. God the Father helps his Son produce branches that bear fruit be every more fruitful. God the Father is the gardener who helps his Son, the vine.

In our Savior's scenario he is the vine. God the Father is the gardener. Christians are fruitful branches.

The purpose for a vine is to extend branches. The purpose of branches is to produce good fruit. Attached to Christ, we Christians bear good fruit. Those fruits are the thoughts and actions of faith in love we extend to our neighbors. All of these fruits we produce not to our own glory but to God's glory. No branch can glory in the ripeness and usefulness of its fruit. All the glory goes to the vine.

The fine Christian couple, Branches Band, here recently, emphasized this in their introduction to themselves and in their music. With our attachment to Christ we love God and love one

another all to the glory of God. In order to produce even more fruits of faith, the Father, the gardener, prunes us branches.

When we lived in Washington State, we lived among fruit orchards literally as far as the eye could see in every direction. You learned to tell which trees would bear lots of good fruit and which ones would not. One key was pruning back the healthy branches. I remember one of my members explaining how vital that is.

The Father does this pruning through the loving discipline and chastisement he sends into our lives. He does not give us all we want when we want it. He takes things away from us even though we feel a great sense of loss and lack of understanding about the why. The Father lays crosses of pain, suffering and sorrow for us to bear.

All of this is to prune us back and make us more fruitful to his glory. The Father, the gardener, prunes away our pride, our arrogance, our self-dependence, our self-righteousness, and our spiritual apathy. The resulting fruitfulness does not come by the pain and want, by the pruning itself. It comes by the comfort and strength and renewal the Father gives us in the vine; the good news of his unconditional love in his Son, Jesus Christ.

How true and at the same time reassuring are the words of the writer to the Hebrew Christians, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” [12:11]

If the branches attached to our grape vines could have spoken when my dad’s pruning shears cut into them they would have said, “Ouch, what are you doing?” Later one, when they bore large, juicy, sweet grapes good for my mom’s homemade jam and syrup, sadly not wine but very suitable for that, the same branches would have said, “Wow, thank you, gardener, for doing that.”

We can think of real vines bearing real fruit to the glory of God their Creator. We Christians bear fruits to the glory of God and thus show that we are his disciples. Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” Bearing fruit does not cause us to be disciples. It shows that we are Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus gives a particular promise to his disciples in connection with our attachment as branches to the vine. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Note the Word of God in us in our connection, the life giving word just as all the life the vine gives to the branches. By that word of grace we wish that God’s name be holy and his kingdom come among us, that we do his will, that he give us our daily bread and forgive all our sins while protecting us from temptation and delivering us from evil.

It is true that our fruits have some bad spots. They do vary in kind and amount from one to another. These are the variables in our sanctified lives. At the same time, we all are branches attached to the Savior who declares, “I am the vine.” The gardener always is always working on us to make our fruits ever better to his glory. Amen. <SDG>