

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 29, 2015
St. John 15:1-8
The True Vine Produces Fruitful Branches
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 large vegetable garden and a small orchard. There also was a decent size grape arbor behind the garage. I still can picture its branches hanging heavy with deep purple fruit.

My dad would lovingly tend the vines. Every year he would lop off the dead branches that bore no grapes. He pruned back the fruitful ones. This pruning made the branches even more fruitful. This is how it is in Jesus. **The True Vine Produces Fruitful Branches.** Jesus is the true Vine. Christians are the fruitful branches.

The grapevine is the trunk which gives the branches their very life. All the water and all the nutrients pass from the vine to the branches, not the other way. Our Savior told his disciples shortly before they left the upper room for the Garden of Gethsemane, literally, "I am the Vine, the true one."

My spiritual life that has replaced my death in trespasses and sins comes only from Jesus Christ, the true Vine. Jesus has given me his righteousness in sacrifice on the cross for forgiveness and salvation. Faith attaches me to him for 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, and I am going to remain in you."

Attached to Jesus the true vine, we are "already clean" through the Word Jesus speaks to us. The Greek word is catharsis. Our spiritual cleanliness comes through the gospel. 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]. Jesus' righteousness is ours. We are holy in God's sight. On my dad's grape arbor, healthy strong vines made for healthy strong branches. So the true Vine produces fruitful branches.

The human vinedresser helps the vine by cutting off dead branches that do not bear fruit. He helps the vine by pruning the fruitful branches. God the Father helps his Son make branches that bear fruit be every more fruitful. God the Father is the gardener, or vinedresser.

The vine's purpose is to extend branches. The branches' purpose is to produce good fruit. Attached to Christ, we Christians bear good fruit. Those fruits of faith are the thoughts and actions of love we extend to our neighbors even our enemies. We produce all these fruits to Jesus' glory. No branch can glory in its fruits' ripeness and usefulness. All the glory goes to the vine.

With our attachment to Christ we love God and love one another all to God's glory. In order to produce even more fruits of faith, the Father, the gardener, prunes us branches. Christians are the fruitful branches.

I often have mentioned that when we lived in Washington State, from our house you could see orchards literally to the foothills or horizons in every direction. I remember one of my orchardist members explaining how to tell the difference between trees that would bear lots of good fruit and the ones that would not. The well pruned trees would be the fruitful ones. The same thing is true with grape vines, and olive trees.

God the Father does this pruning through the loving discipline and chastisement he sends into our lives. He does not always give us what we want, or everything we want, when we want it. He takes things away from us even though we feel a great sense of loss, or, do not understand the why. The Father lays crosses of pain, heartache, suffering, and pain on us.

All of this pruning back makes us more fruitful to his glory. The Father prunes away our pride, our arrogance, our self-dependence, our self-righteousness, and our spiritual apathy. The increased fruitfulness does not come by the pain and want, by the pruning itself. The fruitfulness comes by the nourishing and strengthening comfort and renewal the Father gives us through the true Vine; the good news of his unconditional love in his Son, Jesus Christ we heard about in our second lesson.

How true and 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 back on Stickney Ave. could have spoken when my dad's pruning shears cut into them they would have cried out, "Ouch, that hurts. What are you doing?" Later one, when the

branches 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, vinedresser, 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. This is what Philip did by sharing the good news of Jesus with the Ethiopian. Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

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

The Word of God gives life just as all the life the vine gives to the branches. By that word of grace we want 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. Our fruits of faith differ in kind and amount in us and in comparison with other Christians. 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 true One." The gardener always is working on us to make our fruits ever better to his glory. Amen. <SDG>