

Easter 5 5/3/15
John 15:1-8 B

‘I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. WHOEVER ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE IT IS THAT BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING.’

In a few moments, our confirmands will be asked, as you were asked the day of your confirmation, “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?”

I hold that question before you because of what Jesus says in our Gospel lesson, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

If you watched any news this past week, you saw the sinful flesh unrestrained in the rioting and looting that happened in Baltimore. But even more than looking at the world in which we live, this morning, Jesus is forcing us to take a look at our lives – our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Apart from Jesus, we show only the death of sin. Looking at our hearts and our lives, we see that we don’t produce fruits to the glory of God and service to our neighbor. Instead of being a place of love and joy, our homes are places of yelling, cursing, and name calling. Instead of helping our neighbor to improve and protect their property and income, there is that part of us that just can’t wait until something bad happens to our neighbor, so that we can rejoice in their misfortune. Pride and selfishness, lust and hate, anger and greed – those are the fruits we produce according to our very natures.

Our world and our lives are a witness to the truth of the words of

Jesus, "Apart from me you can do nothing." We cannot live a God-pleasing life apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, by nature, we are dead, decaying branches which can bear no fruit; we can do nothing in our thoughts, words, or deeds which pleases God, but only fill His creation with weeds, and thorns, and thistles.

II. For us and for our salvation, our Loving and Kind Gardener took action. "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you," Jesus says (v. 3). We are clean; that is another way of saying that we are forgiven.

Over their heart, each of our confirmands wears a red carnation. The flower is not just to make them look nice on this special day. No, the color red is a remembrance to them of the price God paid for their eternal salvation. God redeemed us poor sinners "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." John says it this way in our Epistle, "God...loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation -- that is, the atoning sacrifice -- for our sins." Jesus took on our sin and took our place in death. His blood cleanses us from all sin. Three days after His lifeless body was laid in Joseph's tomb, He rose again, bringing life and immortality to light for us.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! As we stand before the empty tomb of Jesus, we learn the truth of our Savior's words: "Apart from Me you can do nothing!" A branch has no life in itself; a branch lives only by drawing life and strength from the vine.

III. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me," Jesus says. In the Confirmation insert in the bulletin this morning, you will notice that each of our confirmand's baptismal date is given. As Christians, that is

really the day we should celebrate as our "birth" day. Your baptism means that as Christ died, you died to sin, and as Christ lives, you live in Christ for all eternity. We live because we are united to Jesus by faith. We draw our life from Him, the resurrected, living Vine.

In their vows, the confirmands will be asked, just as you were asked, "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?"

The only way to remain in Jesus is to be in His Word, because it is through His Word -- the spoken Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments -- that God does His work in us so that He can do His work through us.

"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Notice in our lesson, Jesus never commands us "Go, bear fruit." Or, "You must bear fruit." Jesus is teaching us that we are to remain in Him and "If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." These words of Jesus are not words of accusation and harsh condemnation, they are words of comforting Gospel.

This fruit of faith that Jesus tells us we will do is good works. Good works do **not** earn forgiveness and eternal life; we do not earn brownie points with God by our good works. God does not need our good works. Our neighbor does. We learn this truth from the words of Paul in the 2nd chapter of Ephesians, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

ILL: **BASEBALL.** Throwing and catching are very much part of the game of baseball. But, before you can throw the ball, you must catch the ball. So it is that we receive all of God's good gifts in Christ – forgiveness, love, joy, patience, kindness and the like. Then, we “throw” those good gifts to our neighbor.

Remaining in Jesus and Jesus living in you, you will bear fruit, you will do good works which serve your neighbor in the vocations in which God has placed you. Good works of thought, word, and deed will naturally flow forth from your faith.

For example, its trash day, so the parent says to the child, “Take out the trash,” and the child does -- bearing fruit. You get up in the middle of the night to change the baby's diaper -- bearing fruit. When you give your neighbor a ride to church; help your neighbor rebuild their flooded home; give your money to the ministry of Christ's church; send a sympathy card to a neighbor who is grieving; when a grandparent hugs the grandchild – bearing fruit. When you are contented with the spouse and the stuff God has given you -- bearing fruit. We also bear fruit when we do **not** do those things forbidden by the Commandments. When you do not abandon your spouse, when you do not loot, and steal, and vandalize your neighbor's property, when you do not tell lies about your neighbor -- you are bearing fruit to the glory of God and the service of your neighbor. And, we do this all joyfully, knowing we are Christ to our neighbor; knowing our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Good works serve our neighbor and they glorify God. “This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.”

By abiding in Jesus, being in the Word of God, remembering your baptism, eating and drinking His Body and Blood, Jesus serves your neighbor through the fruit He bears in your faith and life. And yes, you will be remaining true to God in faith, word, and deed.

To God be the Glory. Amen.