

Easter 5 5/2/21
John 15:1-8 B
Confirmation Sunday

'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.'

I brought my baseball glove this morning because baseball is a great illustration of the Christian faith and life. In baseball there is a fundamental truth that is so obvious, you almost don't even need to say it -- before you can throw the baseball, you must first CATCH the baseball.

This fundamental truth of baseball helps understand the words of Jesus, "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" (v. 5).

Last Sunday, we heard the words of King David in the 23rd Psalm about the "darkness" in this valley of the shadow of death. Indeed, Covid, rioting and looting, mass shootings are stark reminders of how "dark" this present age is. But this morning, Jesus isn't asking you to look at the world, He is forcing you to look at your life -- your thoughts, your words, and your deeds.

"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me ... Apart from Me you can do nothing" Jesus says (vv. 4, 5). We are, by nature, dead in sin. Apart from Jesus, we show only the death of sin. Our hearts and our lives show 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 – these are the fruits we produce.

Our world and our lives are a living witness to the truth of the words of Jesus, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (v. 5). 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. The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that our Loving and Kind Gardener took action to save us. “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 reminds them that it is the blood of Christ that cleanses them from all sin. Jesus was born of Mary and became a man so that He could take on our sin and take our place in death. On the cross, His blood was shed to cleanse 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. 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” (1 Jn 4:10).

A branch has no life in itself; a branch lives only by drawing life and strength from the vine, so it is that Christ, risen and alive, is the life-giving Vine, and we draw our life from Him.

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, this is our "birth" day. Your baptism means that as Christ died, you died to sin, and as Christ lives, you live in Christ today and for all eternity. 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?" They are asked that because this is how we remain in Jesus. 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 "Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (v. 5). Living in Christ, we simply bear much fruit.

This fruit of faith that we bear 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" (vv. 8-10).

Remember the game of **BASEBALL?** 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 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 loot, steal, 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. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples,” is how Jesus says in in our lesson (v. 8).

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.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.