

5th S. of Easter 4/28/24
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."

"Stand fast." Every time I hear the words of Jesus in our Gospel, I instantly think of the military command to "stand fast." Stand fast means **"stay where you are,"** "don't move". Don't even blink your eyes.

Listen to Jesus' words: *"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).

Jesus is the Vine. We are the branches. BRANCHES GROW FROM THE VINE AND PRODUCE FRUIT. LIVING, MOVING, AND HAVING OUR BEING IN CHRIST, YOU BEAR FRUIT.

Fruitful branches. That is what and you who you are in Christ. Apart from Christ, we are faithless, and lifeless. You yourself just confessed the truth of Scripture that that you were dead in your sins and trespasses. But it was for dead ones like us that Christ came. He humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin and take on our sin. He paid the wages of our sin by His death on the cross. Because He died that death, we are "clean," that means we are forgiven all our sin. By his Easter victory, he assures us of new life, eternal life. Jesus is the true vine, the living vine, who gives life to the branches. He sustains our life and causes us to be fruitful. We are fruitful as we remain connected and continue to draw our life from him.

And so now, living in Christ, connected to Him and drawing your life from Him, you bear fruit. In fact, Jesus says "much" good fruit, *"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit"* (v. 5). Notice in our

lesson, Jesus never commands us “Go, bear fruit.” Or, “You must bear fruit.” Jesus is teaching us that we are to abide, stand fast, in Him and you will bear fruit. These words of Jesus are not words of accusation and harsh condemnation, they are words of comforting Gospel.

What is this “fruit” Jesus tells us we will bear? The fruit of faith consists in all the good works that we Christians do. Our Little Catechism teaches us this, “In God’s sight a good work is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of his or her neighbor” (Question 163, 154). We love God and we love our neighbor, and it shows as we keep God’s Commandments in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Just so that there is no misunderstanding, let’s be clear on why we bear fruit; that is, do good works. Good works won’t save you; good works won’t earn you brownie points with God; good works will not contribute to your salvation in any way, shape, or form. God does not need your good works. Your neighbor does. And so, Jesus does in His work in you, so that He can do His work through you to serve your neighbor. We learn this truth from the words of Paul in the 2nd chapter of Ephesians,

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (vv. 8-10).

So, what’s the secret to bearing fruit, to doing good works? Simple. Stand fast in Jesus. Abide in the vine, and you will bear much fruit. Remember what Jesus says, “*Apart from Me you can do nothing*”.

Jesus is the Vine; we are the branches. And that means the Vine supplies the branches with all we need to bear abundant fruit. And, He does it through the Gospel, the good news of God's grace in Christ. The Gospel forgives our sins, gives us life and salvation. The Gospel strengthens our faith. It enables our love and energizes our service, so that we can do good works to serve our neighbor.

And, this Gospel comes to you in through the Word and the Sacraments. It's the preaching you hear in church. It's the teaching you receive in Bible class. It's walking by the faith God began at your baptism. It's eating and drinking Christ's life-giving Body and Blood at His table. This is how the life of the vine gets into us branches. To abide in the vine, to draw our life from the vine, we need to be where the Gospel is: here, in Christ's Church.

The DANGER for us is that we lose our connection to the Vine. You know how it happens. Sometimes, we barely notice the withering in our day to day habits. A little anger, resentment, bitterness, lust, gossip, coveting. We see no reason to come to the Lord's Table. We don't read our Bible. We don't pray to God with thanksgiving or in the hour of trial. We just kind of slip away, lose touch. And what happens? We don't hurt God. We don't hurt our neighbor. We hurt ourselves. We dry up. As we separate ourselves from the life-giving Vine, our faiths withers and weakens; maybe even to the point that it just shrivels up and dies. *"For apart from me you can do nothing,"* Jesus says.

The Christian life is the life of repentance. That is why we daily pray with King David, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:5). As a branch of the Vine, the Holy Spirit makes us new, that is, He works a renewal of your whole life -- in spirit, will,

attitude, and desires -- so that we now strive to overcome sin and do good works.

So, let that word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you rejoice in the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation God gives you in your Baptism; as you hear the comforting words of Holy Absolution; as you eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Let God's word transform your mind and sink deep into your soul, as you sing the liturgy and hymns of the church, as you take to heart the preaching of God's word, and as you meditate on God's word in daily devotions. Let Jesus' words abide in you, and you will produce much fruit.

In our post-communion prayer, we pray that we would do just that, "We implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us ... in love for one another – love that shows itself in the fruit of our daily lives.

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, you are bearing fruit. We also bear fruit when we do not do those things forbidden by the Commandments. When you do not commit adultery, steal from your neighbor; 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.

So, the message today is simple: Stay where you are – stand fast in Christ. Abide in the vine, and you will bear much fruit.