

How good are you at making connections? Connections have become quite an important part of our everyday lives. If you are flying on an airline, you want to make sure you don't miss your connection. If you want electricity in your home, you must be connected to the power company. When you go online, you need a connection to a web server. Some of you might even remember when you got your first cell phone. You had to make sure you didn't leave your coverage area, or you would lose your connection.

This Good Friday, let's talk about the most important connection of all -- our connection to Jesus Christ.

Jesus teaches us about our vital connection to Him, *"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). Get the connection? If you are connected to Christ, you are alive. If you are connected to Christ, you will bear fruit. If you are connected to Christ, you will share in His death, His life, His resurrection from the grave and His ascension into heaven. But, if you are not connected to Christ, you are dead.

That's what you are by your very nature. By our human nature, we look like we are alive. But, we believe the lies of the devil. We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We are, by our very natures, blind, dead, and enemies of God. And, because of our sin, it is just a matter of time until you die physically and return to the dust from which you came.

Jesus said it this way, *“If anyone does not abide in Me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned”* (v. 6).

The Good News of the Christian faith is that God wants no one to perish. So, that you and I are not dead branches, producing no fruit, good only to be thrown into the fire, God sent His own Son to make us alive.

You don't have to know much about gardening to understand pruning. Pruning is cutting back the growth. By pruning your roses, shrubs, or trees, you stimulate growth. You cause the rose bush to flower or the shrub to grow all the more. You bring about more by creating less. Jesus tells us that the Father prunes so that even more fruit will abound.

That is what the Father did to His own Son. The Father cut Him down only to see Him spring back! He was pruned hard and heavy so that He might be even more fruitful. He died that He might live again and share the fruits of His salvation with all who would believe!

You notice that in our Good Friday worship, we do not use the altar & pulpit, the chancel area of the sanctuary, to remind us that the disciples abandoned their Lord, and finally, the Father, too, abandoned His own Son to the death of the cross. The black upon the cross and adorning the sanctuary reminds of the three hours of darkness that covered the Father's creation as His Son hung upon the cross extended.

This day, we see the Son of God die. Before nightfall, his lifeless body will be buried in the grave. But, the good news for us and for our salvation, is that Jesus will not stay dead.

In three days, Jesus will rise and bear in His body the fruits of our salvation! He rises, alive forevermore, never to die again. By His death, He obtains the victory over sin. And by His rising again, He triumphs over

the grave. And, like any tree which bears fruit, Christ does not bear these fruits of salvation for Himself. After all, when was the last time you saw an apple tree eating its own apples? So also Christ produces a victory that is for all the world to share. Yes, it is His victory. But, He gives to us the fruit of His victory, so that His victory is really our victory.

In the new birth of our baptism, we are connected to the life-giving vine, Jesus. God the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, so that we are connected to Him in His death, resurrection, and life. As a branch grows out of the vine, we grow out of Christ. Yes, God does this so that we may share with Him His victory over sin and death. But, also, to be fruitful in our own lives. We have been grafted into the living vine, Jesus, that we might bear fruit.

Listen again to 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).

Christ, the life-giving vine, will bear His fruit through you, His branch. What are these fruits? The Apostle Paul tells us, *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Ga 5:22-23).

And, Jesus tells us, bearing these fruits is to His Father's glory, "*By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples*" (v. 8).

We are talking here about good works. Good works are truly the fruit of faith. That is why only Christians can keep the Commandments, doing the things God calls "good". Pagans and unbelievers do nice things for their neighbors, and often they expect praise and reward for doing them. But, God does not consider these "good" works. Unbelievers cannot do good works before God. That is because faith must be present in order for

a fruit to grow from it. We remember the words of Scripture, *Without faith it is impossible to please [God] (He 11:6)*. Or, as Jesus says, *“Apart from Me you can do nothing.”*

St. James said it this way, *Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Ja 2:17)*. No, our good works do not save us or earn us forgiveness of our sins. The good works we do are proof -- evidence, a confession -- that faith is present and, that by that faith, we are connected to the life-giving vine, Jesus. And, like any fruit tree, these good works are not for ourselves. Remember, apple trees do not eat their own apples. Good works benefit and serve our neighbor.

Last night, on Maundy Thursday, we talked about the new commandment Jesus gave us, that we are to love one another, as He has loved us. In that love, we do all for our neighbor, just as Christ did all, laying down His life, for us.

Yes, connections are a part of our everyday lives. We need connections for just about everything in life. But, especially, we need one connection in order to have the life that has no end. We need to be connected by faith to the life-giving vine, Jesus Christ.

Rejoice and be glad, Dear Child of God, for you have been connected to Christ. His death on Good Friday is your death. His resurrection on Easter is your resurrection. And, His life that has no end is your life that has no end.

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