

John 15:1-8
Good Shepherd
April, 2024

In the gospel reading today, Jesus tells us, I am the vine; you are the branches. If anyone remains in Me, and I in him, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. It is obvious then that we should give our attention to **Remaining In The Vine**. So let's do that now.

Remaining in the vine is the most important Jesus connection. This connection involves three things: becoming a branch, remaining in the vine, and bearing fruit.

First, becoming a branch. How do you "become" a branch? Either you are a branch or you are not a branch. And that's the point. You can't make yourself into a branch. Because of our sinful nature, we aren't the kind of branches God wants. We have no connection to the vine. We cut ourselves off from God by our sin, and we can't graft ourselves back on. We have no living connection to God.

I am not an expert on horticulture, but I know if you try to graft a branch onto a vine or tree, there has to be some kind of match, a genetic similarity. There needs to be a certain amount of relatedness, and of course, you need a living branch to graft. If there isn't a relatedness of like to like, the vine will reject what you want to graft on.

This is our problem. How can sinners, dead-in-sin-sinners, get connected to a holy God? We can't do it! God would reject us because of our sin!

For us to become a living branch, God had to do the connecting. It took a miracle of God to make that happen!. Here is how God did it. First of all, Jesus had to clean us up to make us compatible. The sludge of sin makes us incompatible. Jesus accomplished this just a few hours after He spoke these words His disciples.

Then they went to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was betrayed and arrested, and later, brought to trial.

The next day, Jesus paid for our sins and the sins of the world by being nailed to the cross and dying there, in our place. Jesus took our punishment, shedding His blood to make us clean from sin. Jesus took our sins upon Himself and gave us His holiness. It is because of Jesus that we are acceptable to God and not rejected. The gospel declares it, You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. God's Word, which tells us of the work Jesus did for us, is powerful and makes us clean from sin and makes us alive!

And in Holy Baptism, God connects us to Jesus. We have been joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection. We are now living branches, connected to Jesus by God's loving action. It's the Jesus connection by which we become living branches.

Now that we are branches, it is important to remain connected to Jesus. It is absolutely vital that we remain connected to our Lord. Jesus said, Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If anyone remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

There is no life in us unless we remain connected to Jesus. If we do not remain connected to Jesus, we are doomed to hell! Jesus said, If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

How do people get disconnected from Jesus? Well, we have the devil, the sinful world around us, and our sinful nature all tugging at us, trying to rip us off from our Jesus connection. The more our enemies attack our faith the easier it gets to have a weak connection and become detached. When people stop coming to church regularly, they are in grave danger of faith disconnection.

When we let the devil advise us how often to worship and how to live our lives, we are on the road to losing our faith. When we follow the example of the sinful world, we can lose our faith! When Christians are disconnected from God's Church the branch loses its connection to the vine, it stops bearing fruit. It dies. And it will burn! *****

God does not want anyone to burn in hell. That is why Jesus speaks these words to us today. What our Savior wants is for us to remain connected to Him.

How do we remain in the vine? How do we stay connected to Jesus? We have to stay close to the Word of God and use the Sacraments as Jesus instituted them. Through the Means of Grace, the Holy Spirit nourishes our souls, supplying us with life-giving vitality that we need to keep our faith burning brightly. But food for the soul comes only through the Means of Grace! Join us in worship. Listen to the sermons. Read your Bible. Receive the Lord's Supper often. Look over your Catechism. Through these means, the Holy Spirit supplies us with the grace we need to keep going, growing, and bearing fruit!

We have seen that we become a branch through the work of Jesus. We have seen how we remain a branch by faithfully using the Means of Grace. Now let's learn how we bring forth much fruit.

Our Lord tells us, Whoever remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. How does a branch on a tree bear fruit? Does it do so by trying real hard? That would be like me trying to grow taller. It's not going to work. All the branch needs to do is stay connected to the vine, and it will naturally produce fruit.

Now from time to time, the gardener may prune the branch. This happens so that any deadness will be trimmed away and makes the branch more fruitful. In our life, God might have to prune us at times, working repentance in our life, which can be painful, but it keeps spiritual deadness from setting in and taking over.

The thing about a branch bearing fruit is that it doesn't have to do

anything extra to bear fruit. It comes naturally when the branch is drawing its life from the vine. That is the Jesus connection again, which is the key to our being fruitful and faithful. Abide in the vine, Jesus, and we will bear fruit.

What kind of fruit are we talking about? Jesus was encouraging His disciples to love one another. This is the kind of fruit Jesus' disciples will produce, that they love one another as Jesus loved them. How we speak to one another, how we look out for the brother or sister who is hurting, physically or emotionally; how we reach out to the one who hasn't been seen at worship, or the person who is weighed down with sin, with distress, or with depression. This is how love moves into action.

Is there anyone you know who needs help? What are those needs? How can you help them? This is what it means to love one another.

Remember: we are connected to the vine and the vine is Jesus. His love flows into us and then flows out through us to others. The Apostle John wrote, If we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

This is the fruit that Christians, connected to Jesus, will bear. It is the vital Jesus connection, begun at your Baptism, nurtured by God's Word and the Sacrament, that will produce much good fruit, and which gives all glory to God.

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