

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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 a man remains in me and I in him, he 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

I have a picture I want to show you this morning. This is the pear tree in our back yard from a couple years ago. Just look at all the pears. There were so many that the branches began to bend and some of the branches eventually broke and fell to the ground. We went out and saw our tree one day and we almost couldn’t believe our eyes as we said to each other: *“Wow that is a lot of fruit - a whole lot of pears!”* I do not know all that much about pear trees, but we must have a pretty good one.

I also know that for those branches to keep producing good fruit they need to stay connected to the tree. I mentioned we had several branches that fell off, and I suppose it goes without saying, but, those branches never produced another pear. Since those branches weren’t good anymore we threw them away. The reason I am talking about this and am showing you this picture is because this is the illustration Jesus puts before our eyes this morning. As we focus on this picture I want us to consider the truth and rejoice in the fact that we are: **Forgiven and fruitful in Christ!**

Jesus doesn’t waste any time telling His disciples, minus Judas, in no uncertain terms about where their source of life, faith, salvation and every other spiritual blessing comes from – from Him. Jesus says, *“I am the true vine.”* Jesus is the only source of life and forgiveness. He is the only true vine. Listen to the good news Jesus tells the disciples: *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”* Jesus is not talking here about these disciples being sparkling clean because they were well bathed and washed with soap and water from head to toe. He is saying they are spiritual clean – they are righteous and right before God. Did Jesus not remember who he was talking too here? Wasn’t one of these men a former scum of the earth tax collector? Didn’t these disciples even that very day show evidence of petty jealousy and sinful pride? Don’t we? How could Jesus ever call them or us clean? How could Jesus look at us and see no sin?

Perhaps the context of when and where Jesus spoke these words would be beneficial. It was Maundy Thursday evening. Some believe Jesus spoke these words in the upper room, the same room where they celebrated the Last Supper. Others believe

that Jesus uses this picture as He and His disciples were on their way through the olive grove to the garden of Gethsemane. But more important than the when and where Jesus spoke is the reason Jesus could speak this word to them. Jesus knew full well why His disciples were clean. For in the morning Jesus would offer His life (the perfect life He lived in their place) and pour out His blood on the cross so they could stand before God as white as snow. Jesus would pay the price of their sins and ours so that our sins are all paid for and we could be forgiven. As the true vine Jesus would rise again to be our eternal source of life. As long as these disciples were connected in faith to Jesus they were clean, they were forgiven. And so are we! We are forgiven in Christ.

The fact Jesus lived for us and died for us and rose again changes us. We are not only forgiven but also fruitful. Napa Valley in California is filled with grapevines. Row after row of them—as far as the eye can see. All these vines have the same purpose. They're there to produce wine. In order for the grapes to be useful for this purpose, the vines have to be pruned. Without attentive care the vines will become wild and unruly. Some wild vines will produce so many grapes that most of them are not good for anything. Other wild vines will become so overloaded that they can't find enough nourishment to sustain themselves. They'll wither and die. So the gardeners must prune the vines, which isn't always pleasant for the vine. If a vine is pruned in early winter it'll bleed a lot of sap. But in the spring, it will be healthier and produce better fruit. A vine that is carefully cultivated will produce good fruit. Grapes of this sort of vine can be made into the wine that will receive the coveted Napa Valley label and be shipped all over the world for the enjoyment of millions.

In a similar way Jesus says, ***“My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*** Since the time God brought us to faith through our Baptism or when we heard the good news of the gospel, God the Father has been working on us. Sometimes the pruning is painful. Sometimes as God's branches there is a lot of work to do on us. But by grace God is constantly trying to cut away at the sins that plague us and lead us according to His commands.

Jesus reminds us: ***“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 a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*** The Bible makes it absolutely clear that without faith in Jesus it is impossible to please God. The Greek here literally and emphatically makes the point that apart from Jesus you ***“cannot do nothing!”*** There are no good works apart from Jesus. Even those deeds and actions that may look good to us in this world if they are not done in faith, out of love for the Savior, those works are only rotten apples in God's sight.

On the other hand did you notice what Jesus says about those who are in Christ? ***“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.”*** Christians bear fruit. That is what we do. When we belong to Jesus fruits of faith always follow. We will love Him who first loved us. We will love others. ***“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”***

We have a very important truth before us this morning dear friends. If we want better relationships, better marriages, to be better parents or children, if we want our actions to be more God-pleasing we have the key here. If we have areas in our lives that need a lot of work, much pruning to be done in our lives of sanctification, we are told

how this is possible. Eight times in these verses Jesus makes the point about remaining in Him. This is the key to fruitful lives. Stay connected to Jesus and you will keep growing not just in faith but in your Christian attitudes and actions. We will grow in our prayer life so that our prayers begin to match more and more God's will for our lives. Only in Christ will we bear much fruit.

So how do we remain in Jesus? By the Word He has spoken to us. It often makes me scratch my head as a pastor when people talk about all the problems they are having in their lives and yet their worship attendance is inconsistent at best and their Bible Study is lacking. We have our life source, our strength, our nourishment, right here in this Word. It keeps us connected to Jesus. It grows us and guides us. Ignore these words for too long and branches begin to look pretty empty and some may fall from the tree completely. ***"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."***

This is why there is nothing that is more important, nor any other priority to be put higher on our list than taking time for God's Word - here at church and in our homes. As the Psalmist writes: ***"Blessed is the man...(whose) delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers"*** (Psalm 1).

Jesus wants us to remain in Him. He wants us to stand before God on the last day forgiven. He wants our lives to be fruitful. He wants to bless us here and eternally. That is why Jesus puts this simple but powerful picture before our eyes today. We are forgiven in Christ because His great love for us led Him to the cross. We are fruitful in Christ because if anyone remains in Him the truth is we will bear much fruit. My prayer is we bear so much fruit that people begin to take notice. My prayer is others look at our lives like we one day looked at that pear tree in our yard and said: *"Wow that is a lot of fruit!"* My prayer is this is done so that God may be glorified and that others too might by our witness be connected to Jesus, the true vine, and praise our Father in heaven with us. Amen.