

### **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<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are 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 done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

Dear people in God’s Kingdom

It’s good to see green again, isn’t it? I sometimes wonder if people who live in places where it is always green can appreciate the way it feels to see the trees green out again after another long winter. Now the leaves are back. Spring is in full bloom. Everything is green. Well, almost everything. Every year, the coming of spring reveals a few trees that aren’t greening up this year. During the winter their lifeless branches blended in perfectly with the rest of the bare limbs of the healthy trees. But when spring comes, their dead branches stand out painfully from the rest of the growing trees. If you have a dead tree like this standing in your front yard, eventually I suppose the city will come out and paint an orange “X” on it and tell you, “Time to get rid of your dead tree!”

Jesus was fond of using images of green and growing things to talk about our faith and God’s plan of salvation. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...”** A huge plant that sprouted from a tiny seed. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed seed in his field...”** Some seeds fell on bad soil; others sprouted bore fruit. **“The kingdom of heaven is like...”** a field where an enemy planted weeds among the good wheat.

Today he does it again. But this picture is different. This time the green plant in Jesus’ picture does not represent Christians, or the Christian church. This time Jesus himself is the plant. **“I am the true vine... You are the branches,”** Jesus declared this to his disciples as they sat around the table at the Last Supper. Jesus uses this picture of himself as a vine to show us a powerful lesson about life. Because just like the green or dead branches of a tree in a Wisconsin springtime, this lesson about Jesus the Vine and us the branches is truly a matter of life and death. Jesus uses this picture in order to encourage us, to plead with us,

**Theme: Remain In The Vine!**

- 1. It gives life**
- 2. It leads us to produce fruit**

In verse one of John chapter fifteen Jesus is quoted saying, **“I am the true vine.”** By

metaphorically referring to himself as the vine (specifically in the original Greek a grapefruit vine or a vine that produces fruit) Jesus is drawing upon an illustration that was common and familiar to his farming listeners. But the illustration is simple enough for anyone to understand. The concept of fruit growing on a vine is not new to us. We understand the role the vine plays in the production of fruit. It is the vine from which all nutrients and life comes. The vine is the source; it is the origin of the fruit. By calling himself **“the vine”** we easily understand that Jesus is reminding us that He is the source and origin of the fruit.

That Jesus is the source and origin of the fruit is repeated again in verse five when Jesus says, **“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.”** You are now brought into the illustration as a metaphorical branch. Again the part a branch plays in the production of fruit is familiar to us. We understand that the branch is the bearer of the vine’s fruit; provided, that is, that the branch is connected to the vine, a point that Jesus makes by saying, **“apart from me you can do nothing.”**

But before we discuss fruit bearing, a question that you ought to ask yourself is, “How did you become a branch?” How did you come to find yourself attached to Jesus? Well that is a question Paul answers for us in his letter to the Romans where he writes, **“you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree.” (Romans 11:24)** Using a similar metaphor, Paul reminds us that by nature we were dead in our sins, hostile to God, and I lived contrary to God’s will. Because of the sin we were born in and the sin we do, we were not part of the vine; that is we were not connected to Jesus. But because of God’s great love and rich mercy we were grafted into the vine. God the Holy Spirit connected us to Jesus through the waters of baptism and the preaching of His Word. The Holy Spirit created faith inside of us that attaches us to the forgiveness of sins accomplished on the cross and the assurance of salvation proclaimed from the empty tomb. It is by grace that we have been saved; by grace that we have been grafted into the vine.

The reason for this grafting is stated repeatedly by Jesus in our text. The reason you have become a branch connected to the vine is so that you **“bear fruit”**. We can easily assume that the fruit we bear is something good. Indeed in Galatians 5:22-23 we are told, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”** The fruit that has its source in the vine and is ours to bear is any good work that the believer does. Every commandment that is kept, every service provided, every duty fulfilled, every obligation met, and even the very attitude in which these things are done is here metaphorically described by God as fruit.

Bearing fruit is what a branch does naturally. You don’t have to threaten an apple tree to produce apples; you don’t have to bribe an orange tree to produce oranges. Bearing fruit is what a branch connected to the vine does by nature. So when a branch no longer bears fruit we understand there is something unnatural that has happened. Keeping commandments, obeying God, and serving others are natural for the Christian that has, by grace, been connected to Jesus. When a person no longer does these things it is because something unnatural has happened. Jesus explains this unnatural phenomenon in verse four when He says, **“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”** When a person is no longer interested in keeping commandments,

obeying God, and serving others it is because they have separated themselves from the vine, they have separated themselves from Jesus.

Bearing fruit is the purpose of a branch. If it no longer produces fruit, it no longer serves any purpose. In verse two Jesus tells us God the Father, **“cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit”** In verse six He says, **“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.”** The application to the unbeliever doing what Paul calls in Ephesians 5:11, **“fruitless deeds of darkness”** is clear. They and all those who separate themselves from Jesus will burn in the fires of hell.

Like any good gardener, God does not want any branch to be thrown into the fire. And so we read also in verse two, **“every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”** God’s goal is to keep you connected to the vine so that you can keep on producing fruit. He wants you to stay connected to Jesus so that you can keep commandments, obey God, and serve others. The problem is, as long as we are in this world our ability to do those things is frustrated by sin. Like a fungus or a disease, sin causes us to occasionally produce rotten fruit. If that sin is left untreated it will eat away at us until our connection to Jesus is severed. Again, God does not want that to happen and so he prunes us; He cuts away at our disease and infection. In verse three Jesus assures his disciples that God does this through, **“the word I have spoken to you.”** God’s Word; his law cuts away at our sin so that our branch is preserved and fruit production can continue. God’s law leads us to confess our sin, plead for his forgiveness, and pray for the strength to stop doing that sin that threatens to separate us from Jesus.

God prunes us with the law not only to save us from being thrown into the fire, but we are also pruned in order that we will as verse two said, **“be even more fruitful”**. When a branch bears fruit it is not that branch that is praised but the green thumb gardener that cared for that branch. In the same way when you; a Christian keep commandments, obey God, and serve your neighbor it is not you who are to be praised but the divine gardener who connected you to Christ and purifies you from sin.

In verse eight Jesus explains the good works you now can do by saying, **“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** The result of the grafting and pruning, the result of your being connected to Jesus and purified by the Word is you get to give glory to God. NOW by the way, you don’t have to wait till heaven, you are able to glorify God with the things you do now. safe driving to the glory of God, changing diapers to the glory of God, washing dishes to the glory of God, mowing lawn to the glory of God, doing homework to the glory of God, training children to the glory of God, working for the man to the glory of God, paying taxes to the glory of God... you get the idea right. All the fruit you produce; all the good works you do because you are a Christian, are done to the glory of God. You don’t have to look forward to the “someday” when you will be in heaven. As a branch connected to the vine; as a Christian connected to Christ you can enjoy the here and now, celebrate this life, and live in the moment all to the glory of God. But sin and the devil make this difficult at times

How many times have we bought a plant or two hoping to spruce up our yards? They always look so nice when they are brand new in the pot or ground. Someone had obviously taken good care of it before we bought it. So do we – at first. We put it in good soil. We water it regularly, and it grew and produced some very colorful leaves. But then we get busy. Life gets in the way. We water it only

occasionally. It still grows. Not a lot, but it grows. But then we become busier. More places to take the kids. More responsibilities. The plant is now only being watered when it rains. Then one day we think about it again, and it looks horrible. It didn't have any strength left in it and sometimes it is dead.

Maybe some of us can relate to this picture in a spiritual way. Maybe there was a time when we were faithfully watering and feeding our faith all the time. We were quickly growing branches attached to the true, living Vine. But then we became busy. We had school, or children, tournaments, activities, careers, hobbies, vacations. So we watered and nourished our faith a little less diligently. What's a missed church service here and there? Well, I forgot to pray today, but I can always pray tomorrow. Meanwhile, we weather a few storms. Some big ones too – Cancer, death in the family, money problems. We take a hit, but we're still standing.

Then we become busier. More kids. Grandkids. More meetings. We get a pet. We need more free time. There are 18 different places to be over the next 15 weekends. We don't think to feed and nourish our faith as much anymore. Maybe we worship occasionally, like once a month. But it's been a long time since we've been in a bible study. Maybe it's been since our own Confirmation. All we know is that we just don't have any time for that anymore.

But soon, God is going to do what all good gardeners do. He's going to prune us. He is going to throw us into a situation where we really need to be strong, where some people really important to us are relying on us to be strong. But if we haven't been attached to the Vine, then one of two things is going to happen. Either, when we try to move forward our faith is very weak and we are spiritually falling apart. Or worse yet, we won't even notice. We've withered away and died and didn't even realize it was happening.

So many people do the same thing spiritually every day. We consume ourselves with so much busyness that we don't even notice we're getting weakened by Satan. But Jesus gives us a very simple solution: **“Remain in me.” “Remain in me.”** And, in case you missed it the six other times he said it ... **“Remain in me.”** Water your branches with life-giving water. Nourish your faith with regular worship. Feed your faith with the solid food found in the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper and in Bible study. Bear good fruit for the Vine by serving him and serving others. There's really only one secret to making it in this life – **“Remain in me,”** Jesus said, **“and I will remain in you.”** The Lord of all creation, who needs absolutely nothing, is only truly happy when he has you. Amen