

Message

Sunday April 28, 2024

**JESUS ABIDES IN US TO BEAR FRUIT**  
**Pastor Hans Peethala**

Three men went out to play a round of golf, Moses, Jesus, and an old man. Moses tee'd off first, and the ball landed in the water. He parted the water and hit the ball in for a birdie. Jesus' tee'd off next, and the ball landed in the water. He then walked on the water and hit the ball in for a birdie.

Lastly the old man tee'd off, but before the ball could hit the water, a fish jumped out and caught the ball in its mouth. Then an eagle swooped down and caught the fish. Lightning then struck near the eagle, frightening it, and it dropped the fish. When the fish hit the ground, it dropped the ball in for a perfect hole in one.

Jesus and Moses turn to the old man, and **Jesus said, "Dad, if you don't quit playing like that, we're not going to bring you anymore."**

Dear Friends! This is the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's explore God's Word and see what this relationship does for us in John 15

**THEME: JESUS ABIDES IN US TO BEAR FRUIT**

John 15:1-17 poses challenging questions to the contemporary Christian community about its self-identity. **What does it mean for the church to live as the branches of Christ the vine?**

First, the image of community that emerges from John 15:1-17 is one of interrelationship, mutuality, and indwelling. It is impossible to determine where one branch stops, and another branch starts. All run together as they grow out of the central vine.

What this vine image suggests about community, then, is that there are no free-standing individuals in the community, but branches who encircle one another completely. **The fruitfulness of each individual branch depends on its relationship to the vine, nothing else. This means as you as a congregation and I as the pastor grow in the vine we witness the fruits.**

Second, the metaphor of the vine suggests **a radically non-hierarchical model for the church.** Fruitfulness is the only differentiation among branches, and **the discernment of fruitfulness falls to the gardener (God) alone**, not to any of the branches. **It is the gardener's role to prune and shape the vine to enhance fruitfulness. All branches are thus the same before God, distinguishable only by their fruit.**

But sadly, we judge others, and we want to prune others and we break relationships and the branches.

For the Fourth Gospel, there is only one measure of one's place in the faith community -- **to love as Jesus has loved and all, great and small, ordained and lay, young and old, male, and female are equally accountable to that ONE STANDARD.** The church would be a community in which **decisions about power and governance would be made in the light of the radical egalitarian love of the vine image.**

Third, Jesus gives us the Spirit of unity that we may have one mind as we are led to proclaim the Gospel. The power of God makes us one with the Spirit to do the will of God like Philip. God leads us through His Spirit.

God gave us the Holy Spirit to give us ears to hear. The prophets were filled by the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit gave them ears to listen and words to speak God's word.** The Spirit of God is so powerful, who gives us the strength to do what we cannot do by our own strength.

If we look at the book of Acts that was read to us 8:26-40, we see that **"An angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza"**. So, he started out on his way and met an Ethiopian eunuch, who was like the queen of the Ethiopians. This man went to Jerusalem to worship and on his way was sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah. **The Spirit told, go to that chariot, and stay near it. The Holy Spirit led Philip to ask the eunuch, do you understand what you are reading? How can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me?**

Dear friends, **The Spirit of God gave Philip the stamina and the strength to run faster than a chariot and stay near him.** God leads us to missions through his Holy Spirit and gives us the wisdom to understand and explain God's word.

The Spirit of God led Philip and the Ethiopian to the waters, to be baptized as God has commanded in Matthew 28:18-20 go into the world and baptize in the name of the father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We often think, how can we spread the Gospel, we try hard, we break our heads, **but God reminds us through his word, Missions is not what we do by our own strength, but It is God who does for us, He leads us into His mission.**

Something that I find amazing in this passage is that the actions of the "gardener" are similar in both cases! **The unfruitful branches are "cut off" (*airo*) and the fruitful branches are "pruned" or "cut clean" (*kathairo*).**

From what I can gather, **neither of these terms (*airo* nor *kathairo*) are primarily horticultural terms.**

***AIRO* means "to lift up and carry (away)." It is used of the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Something that is "taken away" may be "destroyed," the meaning of the word in John 11:48.**

Although this is the only instance of *kathairo* in the NT, there are a number of related words (*katharizo*, *katharismos*, *katharos*, *katharotes*) used in the NT that clearly indicate that **the stem *kathar-* refers to the elimination of ritual impurities or contaminations.** Terms related to "clean" or "purify" are frequently used to translate this group of words. E.g., **the jars of purification in John 2:6 (see also 3:25); and the cleanliness of the disciples in John 13:10-11.**  
NOTE: *katharos* is translated "cleansed" in 15:3

Typically, in John's writing, there are many layers of meaning. **God, the gardener, can prune the branches, which can also be understood as a cleansing or purifying of the disciples.**

There appears to only be two acts of the "gardener" in this analogy -- and both involve cutting. **One cutting is to destroy the branch** the other is **to improve the branch's fruit bearing ability.**

Twice in this text Jesus says, "I am the vine." The first time, in v. 1 (where "true" or "real" is also added), **he makes a connection with the Father = the gardener** who prunes the branches so that they might bear more fruit. **The use of "true" and "real" suggest that there could be false and unreal "vines" from which one might seek to find nourishment for bearing fruit.**

The second time Jesus says, "I am the vine," in v. 5, **He makes a connection with "you," the people = the branches.** All three elements are necessary to grow proper fruit: the gardener, vine, and branches -- the Father, Jesus, and disciples through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*MENO* - Another word with a double meaning is *meno* -- translated "abide" in our text, but it also carries **meanings of "remain, stay; live, dwell; last, endure, continue."** This word occurs 11 times in 15:1-17. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit if it is disconnected from the vine, **neither can disciples bear fruit if they are disconnected from Jesus.**

Faith is always changing. Even though one is connected to the true vine and even though one's faith is firmly rooted in Jesus Christ. The "root" of one's faith never changes, **but from year-to-year one's faith needs pruning by God.** Maybe some **old habits or thoughts or attitudes or behaviours need to die**, so that, through **the power of Jesus**, even **more fruit will be produced in one's life.**

Some homework for the week. **Question 1:** What has been pruned out of your life in the last five years and **what new fruit has Jesus produced in your life during that time?** If you can't think of anything, **consider how often you have let the Word of God cut into the depths of your life leading to confession and cleansing and then a more fruitful life.**

**Question 2:** What in your life needs pruning? What keeps Jesus from producing new fruit in your life today? If you can think of some things -- rejoice! **The sharp-edged Word of God is working in you -- pruning and purifying, killing, and making alive.** Your faith won't be quite the same next year as it is now. **You'll have been pruned and you'll be producing more fruit.** Let us go in peace. Amen