

Pastor Shaun Arndt

May 2, 2021

Sermon Text: John 15:1-8

You are the Branches

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a sermon you can see all around, especially this time of the year! Jesus uses a grape **vine** and its branches, but we can also see the important points He makes illustrated as we look at the trees filling out leafy branches along with colorful blossoms and spring flowers. The Lord says: **You are the branches.**

Jesus compares us to **branches**. You know that branches don't just appear out of thin air. Branches cannot exist by themselves. A branch by itself will die by themselves. Branches *need* a plant, a tree trunk, or in the case of grape **branches**, they *need* the **vine**. No **vine**, no living branches.

And the Son of God, Jesus Christ says: **I am the Vine; you are the branches.** Could Jesus make it any clearer that we absolutely *need* Him?

Actually, He does, over and over in our Gospel. At the start of verse 4, Jesus says: **Remain in me.** At the end of the verse: **unless you remain in me.** In verse 5: **the one who remains in me.** Verse 6: **remain in me.** And verse 7 too! **If you remain in me.**

Five times in four verses Jesus hammers home this key point: **remain in me...** We absolutely, totally, completely, always need Jesus and are utterly dependent upon Him for everything, but especially for any and all spiritual life, peace, forgiveness and heaven. **You are the branches**, so you *need* Christ.

The illustration is clear: (holds stick). There is no life in this unattached stick for it has been broken away from the tree. It is dried up. So it will have no leaves. It will bear no flowers and no fruit. It will go into the fire pit in my backyard. Jesus says: **If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

It is not uplifting for our human pride, but it is God's truth we need to hear and take to heart. By nature, we are so thoroughly and sinfully corrupt, that we have no ability to save ourselves, no way to get right with the Holy God. We lack perfection and have sin that deserves hell's undying fire.

But with Jesus, there is life. The illustration is clear. **I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit.** When a branch remains on a grape vine, or on a plant like this one, the branch is alive. It receives life from the **Vine**, nourishing sap with the food and drink and it lives and thrives and will produce fruit.

Jesus is **the Vine** who gives life to the **branches**, indeed, He says He is the *true Vine*. He says, **I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.**

These words **true vine** are significant. In the Old Testament Scriptures, God often compared Israel to a grape vine or a vineyard that He planted and cared for. Psalm 80 says about God bringing Israel out of slavery with these words: **you brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.**

Jewish coins from around the time of Christ are stamped with the grapevine as a symbol of Israel. The Jewish historian Josephus describes how at this time there was the sculpture of an intricate, golden grapevine adorning the gate of the temple.

But there was a problem. When it came to being a fruitful grapevine, Israel wasn't one! In Isaiah 5, the Lord says: **What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?**

Far from being a true and fruitful grapevine that would glorify God, the Lord says this about Israel in Jeremiah: **I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?** (ch. 2)

Old Testament history is full of examples of how Israel failed to be true and fruitful to the Lord, turning aside to idols, rebelling against His commands and not listening to His Word.

And we are no different. The same sinful corruption infects us so that we depend on people and things ahead of the Lord or love them more than Him who gives us all good things.

Instead of statues to false gods like Baal, we make idols in our hearts out of medicine, health, career, work, wealth, pleasure, leisure time and a thousand and one other things .

Think how often Jesus tells us: **remain in me...** and yet how often do we take our faith and our hearing God's Word in worship, Bible study, reading Scripture, having devotions, thinking about His promises as a matter of life and death, as much as a **branch remaining in a vine**?!

Israel was not the true and faithful vine, and neither are we. So thank God for Jesus who says: **I am the true Vine.**

The sinless Son of God came into this world, planted in place of Israel, planted in your place and mine. As the holy God and perfect man in one person, He was exactly the **true** and faithful and holy **Vine** God wanted and required.

His trust and love for His **Father** was flawless and unbroken. Jesus set up no idols in His heart, doing His Father's will was His joy and delight. Though He is author of Scripture, in your place and mine, He gladly and eagerly heard, learned, lived and taught God's Word. His life was overflowing with the holy fruit God requires.

And yet in love divine and amazing, He chose to suffer the fate of dead, fruitless branches that are thrown into the fire! On the cross He was cut off from the love of the Father, enduring hell's agony and then death instead of us for our every sinful corruption and failure to love God and His Word.

But like a plant spring out of seemingly dead, burned ground and growing up into a mighty tree, Jesus rose to life on the third day. As **the true** and ever living **Vine** He does not keep His life and victory to Himself, but gives the holiness, forgiveness and eternal life He won to all who believe in Him. You know, like how **the Vine** gives life to the **branches**. And Jesus says: **You are the branches.**

Again, branches don't just appear. And branches don't go and connect themselves to a tree. The only reason we are connected to Jesus in faith is because of the mercy of that great **gardener the Father** who saw to it that we grew from and were joined to Jesus' saving work through the Good News of Christ in Baptism and Bible

message. So **you** and **I are the branches** entirely by God's doing, only through the gift of Holy Spirit created faith.

And as living **branches** joined to Jesus, we have an awesome purpose – to produce the fruits of Christian life. That is to trust the Lord's Word, to live out the callings He has given us in life out of thanks for Jesus and guided by His Word. We get to serve the Lord who saved us by serving the people He puts into our lives, that in word and action we may **prove to be** Jesus' **disciples** that others might see and be drawn to Christ. **You are the branches** made to **bear fruit**.

But that doesn't happen by our gritting our teeth and trying hard. It happens the same way **branches** produce fruit, by drawing their life and strength from the tree. So not only do good works *not save* us at all, but naturally flow from faith, but they cannot even happen without Christ giving us life. Jesus says: **You cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit."**

Saved by Christ you naturally want to honor Him with your life. But that only happens when we **remain in Him**. And the way to remain in Jesus is to **remain in His word**, where He freely forgives our sins and feeds our faith. Through Word and Sacrament He declares you Holy and makes you holy, He forgives you and enables you to live as His forgiven people. **You are the branches**, bearing fruit only as we **remain** in Christ, the **Vine**.

While we live in this sinful world, our fruit will never be as much as we want and is so often accompanied with sinful weakness. And yet listen to the marvelous thing the Lord sees: **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you**. The message of Jesus' sin cleansing forgiveness cleans not only the believer, but their imperfect works too!

Sort of like this—Yes, it's a dandelion. For many people it is a weed they work hard to get rid of. And yet to a mom or dad, grandma or grandpa, it can be the most beautiful flower in the world clutched in the hands of a little child. It's still a weed, but the flower is the loving response of a much loved child.

As faulty as our works are and remain this side of heaven, and though they can never save us, yet they are every bit as beautiful to the Lord as a dandelion given by a dearly loved child, because He loves us, saves us and has given us the faith that loves Him dearly in response.

You are the branches – saved by Christ, connected to Christ, living eternally because of Christ, able to serve God with good works on account of Christ. **You are the branches, remain** in Jesus as you **remain** in His **word** and **bear much fruit**. Amen.

Blessed are they who delight in the Lord's instruction, they are like a tree planted besides streams of water, whose leaf does not wither. Amen.

We continue with the liturgical song on page 8 of the worship folder.