

## **The Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 2, 2021 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam**

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 “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. 6 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. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

**Now to him, who is able, . . . , to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)**

Scriptures record seven times that Jesus used the phrase “I am” and then went on to describe something about himself. Last week we heard him say, “I am the Good Shepherd.” This morning he says, “I am the vine; you are the branches.”

If there is one thing the people of Jesus’ day were familiar with it was grape vines. Grapes were important in Israel for several reasons: They were a source of fruit in their diet. They were used to produce wine. Wine was used in their meals, it was used as medicine, and it was used in their worship. Grape vines, and the fruit that they produced were a very important part of life in Jesus’ day. So Jesus uses that picture of a grape vine to share with his disciples something even more important. He 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. 6 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” (vs. 5-6).**

Jesus is talking to his disciples of all generations about being connected to him.

Staying connected to people today is easier than ever, and social media websites have certainly seen to that. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow us to almost instantly post information about ourselves for others to see, and see what the people in our lives are saying about themselves. Cell phones make it easier for us to call or text anyone, anywhere, at anytime. Staying connected to people who are half way around the world can be done at the push of a button or the click of a mouse. That truly has been a blessing during these 13+ months of pandemic.

But regardless of what technology you are using, whether it is cellular, satellite, cable, or even the now “old fashioned” phone line, a communication technology is only as good as its connection. If the connection isn’t solid you will not have a good flow of information. You won’t be able to understand what others are trying to communicate.

Jesus is working to make that very point with his words recorded here in John’s Gospel. Staying connected to Christ is about more than just hearing his words. Staying connected to Christ is life itself! With these words our Lord, Jesus, is pleading with us ...

### **Keep Connected to the Vine!**

- I. From the Vine comes life.
- II. Through the Vine God-pleasing fruit is produced.

Jesus uses the familiar picture of a grape vine to describe himself. What does a grape vine do? It provides nourishment and life to all of the branches connected to it. That's what Jesus does. He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches" (v. 5). You are the branches connected to Jesus. At your baptism you were connected to Christ and his life saving work. Through water and the Word the Holy Spirit filled you with a living faith that connects you to Christ's forgiveness, and covers you with Jesus perfect life of righteousness.

If you want to receive what Jesus offers then you need to be connected to him. That connection only comes through Jesus' Word. He says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, [...]" (v. 7). The inspired words of the Bible are what give us the connection to Jesus. Those words also strengthen that connection. So, how connected are you to Jesus? How well do you stay connected to him by reading and studying his word? This is the point where that little voice in our heads might be saying, "Read the Bible? I hardly have time to read what my friends are saying on Facebook!" Yet, we do have time to look at Facebook, don't we. We seem to have all kinds of time to read and watch things on the internet and on television. So, are we better connected to worldly news than to our Savior? Do we have a better connection to sports and statistics than we do to the True Vine? Are we better connected to people by e-mail and cell-phones than we are to the Son of God? Is our connection to our schedules what controls our lives, or is it our connection to Jesus life giving word? Don't lose your connection because only a connection to the Vine gives life.

And that is not a connection you can fake. I've done a lot of pruning on trees in my year this past month. If I took one of those cut off branches and reattached it to the tree with some really strong tape, would the branch grow? Would the branch get leaves and fruit on it? No. It's dead. Just because it is taped to a tree doesn't mean it is really connected to the tree. It needs to be in the tree, connected into the tree's life giving sap, for that branch to be able to have life. Jesus said, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers" (v. 6a). It's easy for us to look like we are connected to Jesus. But if we are not really IN Jesus – connected to him through his Word and his Supper – then like a branch that is not really connected to the vine our faith is going to wither. We need his life-giving sap which the Holy Spirit gives to us through Word and sacrament.

Even when we are connected to Jesus we need to be careful not to lose that connection. The devil is really good at distracting us from keeping connected to the Vine. He tempts us with cravings for knowledge, fame, power, exotic vacations and so on. He dangles in front of us the desire to fulfill our longings for sex or money. The world, along with Satan's help, likes to develop in us the desire for "stuff" before our eyes. The pull of material things and the cravings of our sinful hearts can put so much pressure on our connection with the Jesus that our connection with him breaks. The stronger our connection to this world becomes the weaker our connection to Christ will be. So be careful! Don't lose your connection! Jesus said of those branches that do not remain in him will be "picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (v. 6b); burned in the eternal fires of hell.

This is not what Jesus wants for you. He wants you to remain in him so you can have eternal life. That is only possible through his word. Jesus told his disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (v. 3). The hearts of people are cleansed by Jesus' words which tell us of his work of salvation. "[...] the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a

ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus gave up his perfect life to pay what God demanded for our sins. He gave up his life to pay for all the times we wanted to be connected to things other than the true Vine. He poured out his life-blood to cover our sins. Then he rose from the dead so he could pour out the life-giving sap of his Holy Spirit into our hearts, giving us new life. He connected us to himself by his blood, through his word. By the power of his Holy Spirit working in us he wants us to remain in him, so we can share in the eternal happiness and joy of heaven. So don't lose your connection because only a connection to Jesus, the Vine, gives life.

For a branch to stay alive and to be able to produce anything it has to stay connected to that which gives it life: whether that is a vine, or the trunk of a tree, or the stalk of a bush. As long as that branch remains connected do you know what it will do? It will produce fruit! Do you have to tell it to do that? Do you have to go out and demand that it produce fruit, or yell at it to make sure that it hears what you are saying? Of course not. You do not have to tell the branch to do anything. It will produce fruit all on its own because that what branches do! The same is true for us: Only connected to the Vine can you produce fruit.

The "fruits" which we produce are all of the things that we do that give glory to God. It is all of the things that we do to thank God for saving us. And these are not hard or difficult things; these are not things that are complicated or require a great deal of thought. These are simple things which God places before us in our every-day lives.

For example: Last Sunday here at Good Shepherd was Examination and Confirmation Day. It is a day that the young people in our congregation who have completed their basic studies in God's Word have a chance to confess the faith which Jesus has given to them. As they make that confession we are all reminded of the faith God has planted in us. This day gives us an opportunity to talk about our faith, to speak to others about how God has connected us to our Vine, Jesus. Just as these young people will confess their faith, so we can confess our faith! The faith that we confess in our worship every week and in our lives every day. As those who are connected to the Vine you can produce that fruit!

Yet, Jesus makes it clear, that can only happen when we are connected to him. He 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" (v. 4). It's easy to think that we are doing something "for God," or "in Jesus name." But if what we do goes against something God says in his word then we are not really producing fruits of faith. What we are doing is sinning. We cannot produce fruits of faith if what we do is not connected to Jesus and his word. When we fall into that sin of pride, trying to produce fruit our own way, we need to repent. And when we do we know we can turn to our Lord for forgiveness because he paid for that sin too.

And as we produce fruits of faith our actions show the world around us that we are disciples of Jesus. As his disciples we want to share with others what he has taught us. Believing and trusting in everything Jesus did and said moves our hearts to tell people about Jesus. Sharing Jesus saves people by connecting them to that life giving Vine. It saves people from their sin. It saves them from spending an eternity in hell. But we can only produce that fruit by staying connected to the Vine. Being connected to Jesus fills us with the joy of his forgiveness. Connected to Christ, the love of our Lord

flows into our souls filling our faith with its life giving nourishment. That love of Jesus moves us to produce fruits which serve our neighbor and glorify our God

Remember, staying connected is important. It's important in our relationships with the people closest to us. And it is even more important in our relationship with God. Jesus tells us to remain in him because he is the one who gives us true life. When we remain in Jesus we have the power and ability to produce fruit. It is the fruit of thanks and praise which gives glory to our gracious God for all that he has done for us. Jesus pleads with us this morning to Keep Connected to the Vine, because new spiritual life flows to us through the vine and with that new life we are able to produce God-pleasing fruits of faith. Amen.