

May 6, 2012
Easter 5

"The True Vine and the Beautiful Branches"

JOHN 15:1-8

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^[a] 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, 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.

⁵ "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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Jesus often used familiar examples from daily life to illustrate his unique love for us. Last week we heard Jesus describe himself to us as the good shepherd who gives himself for the sheep. Today we listen to Jesus describe himself to us as the true vine. He lovingly describes us as branches closely connected to him that bear beautiful fruit.

We who live here on the Central Coast are very familiar with grape vines and branches and beautiful clusters of grapes. These vines just don't grow by themselves. They are strategically planted in certain soils where they will get maximum exposure to the sun and cool evening breezes. They are carefully pruned to produce grapes that will produce outstanding wines. The people who pour the wines in the tasting rooms proudly speak of certain clones and varieties that were carefully planted in soil with the right blend of clay and limestone.

Here you are this morning. You are the most privileged people in the whole world because you are connected to Jesus as a branch is connected to the vine. From all eternity your heavenly Father chose his Son to be the perfect source of your forgiveness and eternal life. From all eternity you were chosen to be attached to Jesus the vine even though you were born spiritual dead and destined for eternal death and punishment. And from all eternity the Lord your God planned out the fruit that would be produced in your life to the glory of his name. Grape vines and branches and fruit are carefully planned. That's the story of your life and mine, beautiful branches connected to Jesus the beautiful vine.

The true vine

Jesus draws our attention to what a beautiful vine he truly is with these words, "I am the true vine and my Father is gardener." If you were to translate these words literally Jesus would be saying, "I am the vine, the true one." Although there may be many wonderful grape vines in the world that produce outstanding wines, there is only one true vine that provides forgiveness of sins for the world and everlasting life. Jesus is that one true

source of salvation. He made the exclusive claim for himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

A few years ago Oprah Winfrey got into an argument with a woman from her audience who dared to make the claim that Jesus said he was the only way for people to be saved. Oprah was aghast that anyone could be so narrow-minded. She opined that there are many different religions with many different names and all are equal paths back to God. Jesus' words are so clear, so simple and so true. "I am the true vine." There may be many different kinds of vines with names like pinot noir, chardonnay, merlot, cabernet and syrah. But there is only one true vine to which we can be attached to escape the judgment to come and have eternal life. That name is Jesus. Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Jesus speaks about his heavenly Father as the gardener. The Greek word for gardener or farmer is "georgos" from which we get the name "George." The great vineyards of the world have expert gardeners or vineyard managers. From all eternity our heavenly Father planned to plant his Son into this world to be the source of salvation for people. The Father planned the perfect time for his Son to be born into this world. "When the fullness of time was come God sent forth his Son." The Father and Holy Spirit planned out the life Jesus would live, even the temptations he would experience, so he could live the perfect life we could never live. The Father planned out from eternity how he would lay on his Son the sin of the world, and then punish his own Son in our place. All of this was necessary because the fruit we produce in our lives is corrupted by sin.

Please look my dear Christian at how carefully your Father manages your life that is attached to his Son the beloved vine. "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." I have stopped and looked closely at how the grape vines are trimmed so that I might learn how to do this with the grape vine in my yard. The vine dressers cut back the branches and cut back the shoots to allow several shoots to stick up and produce the best grapes possible. What does the heavenly Father want with your life? He wants you to remain attached to Jesus his Son. He wants you to bear fruit that results because you are a true branch attached to Jesus the true vine.

Skilled gardeners are able to take branches from one vine and attach them to another vine. This is called grafting. As skilled as some are, no one can ever take a dead branch and attach it to a live vine to make it come to live again. That is what the Lord your God does for you. You and I are dead branches lying in the rows of life, ready to be picked up and burned in the fire. Ephesians 2 says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live...But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved." Not only did your heavenly Father plan from all eternity to provide you with his Son as the source of your salvation, he planned and created the faith that allows you to be attached to Jesus, the true vine.

I recall reading a sermon on this by the well known London preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He described a time in his life when he had to take leave of his famous London church after suffering a bout with depression. He was recuperating from his illness in

France where he was staying in a cottage near a vineyard. It was a chilly, dark night. He kept feeding the fire in the stove with dried, dead branches that had been cut from the vines. He watched the fire consume the dead branches. Then the thought came to him, "That could be me, perishing eternally in hell." Then he thought of the wonderful grace of God that attached him as branch to Jesus the vine. From that experience he went forth with new vigor and new strength to continue with his ministry and preaching.

The beautiful branches

Because you are attached to Jesus the true vine you are also a true branch that will live forever with Jesus. So many benefits come to you because you are attached to the vine. Jesus says, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." Jesus' words pronounce us clean. When he died on the cross he cried out, "It is finished!" He announced that our sin was paid for completely. The Father showed he accepted Jesus words as true by raising him to life again. Because you are a branch attached to the vine, you are privileged to have everything Jesus promised a huge reality in your life. I am not clean and acceptable to God because of the fruit I produce in my life. Even my best moments, my shining moments, when my output of love is at its quintessential best, I fall short of God's glory. How blessed we are to hear our true vine tell us we are clean through him.

Because you are a true branch attached to Jesus the true vine, you are privileged to bear fruit that brings great joy in your life, and also brings glory to the Lord. Jesus says, "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." Jesus also says, "If you remain in me you will bear much fruit." And in verse 8 he says, "This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

It is an honor and privilege to bear fruit for the Lord. The vinedresser will prune the branches so they become even more fruitful. The Lord may allow adversity to come into our lives to actually bring us closer to him. At times the branch may feel like crying out to the heavenly Father, why are you pruning me and cutting me and hurting me. Jesus has the answer. "This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit." Oh, what beautiful fruit you now bear for the Lord and the honor of his name, fruit that is clean and pure and acceptable through Jesus. Galatians describes the fruit that comes from you because you are a true branch connected to Jesus the true vine. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control."

Every day of life on this earth is an opportunity to live for the risen Lord and Savior, to joyfully proclaim, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." Every day is a day to join the Apostle Paul in saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The love that Jesus has for you as the true vine produces fruit that is pleasing to your heavenly Father, pleasing to yourself and pleasing to people around you.

Jesus wants us to remain in him. He offers us a warning, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned." I don't want to be a branch that becomes diseased by sin and self reliance and loses its connection to the vine. I want to stay close to Jesus.

That is why I need to be in his Word every day or I am lost. I need his precious body and blood for my forgiveness and so do you.

Because you are connected to the true vine, as a true branch you have the privilege of prayer. Jesus says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you." Because of your connection to Jesus and his Words you find yourself praying to your heavenly Father and asking him for things that he wants you to have in your life that are best for you. Think of all the times you have prayed the simple prayer to Jesus your true vine, "Lord Jesus give me strength." Think of how many times your prayers as a true branch to the true vine have been answered beyond your hopes and expectations. We ask according to his will and he hears us. In the front of our church, near the altar we have some beautiful stained glass windows showing the vine and the branches and beautiful grapes that are being produced. That dear Christian is your life, a true branch connected to the true vine bring forth much fruit. Amen.