

Pentecost 15
August 28, 2016

“Jesus, Our True Vine, Never Changes”

HEBREWS 13:1-8

Keepon loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. ⁴ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” ⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Visit the vineyards here along the Central Coast and you will see grape vines with bunches of grapes hanging from their branches. That’s what grape vines do. They send out branches that produce fruit.

Jesus tells us in John 15 that he is the true Vine and we are branches connected to him. Because we are connected to him he tells us we are clean or forgiven of all the sins of our past life. Because we are connected to him he enables us to bear fruit out of love for him. That fruit includes a deeper love for him and great kindness and love for others in our families, in our church and in our community.

We just read from this chapter in Hebrews that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. The vine does not change. That means Jesus will produce fruit in your life and mine just as he did for Christians living in the first century when these words were written. In the 1960’s we heard Bob Dylan sing, “The times they are a changing.” In my opinion, and perhaps you share this with me, the times are changing even more in this decade in which we are living. Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Look at the love that Jesus produces

Because of Jesus, the true Vine, there is a love being produced in your life that is unique because you are a branch connected to him. The writer to the Hebrews tells these persecuted Jewish Christians, “Keep on loving each other as brothers.” Notice it does not say, “Start loving each other as brothers.” It says, “Keep on loving each other.” Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

When you are connected to Christ Jesus as a branch is connected to a vine, you know what Jesus has done to rescue you from being children of Satan and his kingdom. You know what he has done to wash you clean of sin and make you dear children of your heavenly Father. This love that Jesus has for you wells up inside of you and begins to produce fruits of the Spirit mention in Galatians 5 as love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self control. One Roman historian said of the Christians living in the Roman Empire, "They treat each other as brothers and sisters." I want more of this love in my life and so do you.

Because you are attached to Jesus the true Vine and he never changes, you will also have a deep love and concern for people who are not part of your Christian family. That love will extend to total strangers or people you meet for the first time. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." Can you think of someone in the Bible who showed kindness to strangers without realizing he was showing kindness to God's angels? Sure you can. That person was Abraham. In the heat of the day, near the great trees at Mamre, he looked out of his tent and saw three men standing nearby. He ran out to them, bowed to the ground, gave them some water to drink, washed their feet, and prepared a sumptuous meal for them of fresh bread prepared by Sarah his wife. In addition there was a choice, tender calf from the herd, served with curds and milk. These were two of God's angels along with the Lord himself appearing to him in human form.

Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker that reads, "Practice random acts of kindness." Because you are connected to Jesus the true Vine, you will not just practice random acts of kindness, you will plan carefully planned acts of kindness. So where ever you go you actively and intentionally look for opportunities to show kindness to people. It's obvious the girl at checkout counter in Walmart is having a bad day. Your act of kindness, your hospitality, your smile, your respect, your love flows from deep within you because you are attached to Jesus the true Vine. You know the kindness and love Jesus showed to you. This past week I was reading from Matthew 9 where it says of Jesus, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." You know what your Shepherd has done to rescue you. You want the whole world to know this life-saving love.

Jesus doesn't change. Because you are a branch attached to him, you are concerned about other branches attached to him who are going through hard times. "Remember those who are in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Your fellow Christians who read these words in the first century of the Christian church personally knew other believers who were imprisoned and suffering for their faith. The Apostle Paul needed the support and prayers of others. He carried on his body numerous scars from the beatings he had received for the name of Jesus. We cannot forget brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering for their faith in Africa and the Mideast and the Philippines and China, and even here in our country as they confess their faith in a world that is becoming increasingly more hostile to the gospel.

Because you are a branch attached to Jesus the unchanging vine, you are going to have beliefs on marriage and family that are radically different from the world around you. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral." You want to honor marriage because it was set up by God in the Garden of Eden. You know how the rules on marriage have totally changed in the last few years. The times may change but you are holding to what your Lord Jesus said in Matthew when he quoted from Genesis "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'" The love that

Jesus has for husbands leads them to love the wives as much as Christ loved the church. The respect the church has for Jesus its head leads wives to respect their husbands as their heads. The love that Jesus has for you leads you to take an aggressive approach towards any sexually immoral thoughts that come into your life.

I know there are lots of grape vines in this valley with lots of branches producing lots of bunches of grapes. I would have you look at a certain group of people all over this world, who are attached to Christ the Vine, who have a radically different view of money and what it means to them. Look at how their lives are being changed when it comes to how they view money. "Keep you lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

They are people who love money not because of what it can do for them but because of what it can do to help other people. They are people who are content in their lives because the Lord is their greatest treasure. They know the Lord will not leave them or forsake them. They know that goodness and mercy of Jesus their Shepherd will follow them all the days of their lives. They say with the prophet Jeremiah, "Your mercies are new to us every morning, great is your faithfulness." They confess with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

You see dear Christians, Jesus the Vine does not change. Throughout history and throughout the world he continually produces branches that are bearing abundant fruit out of love for what he has done for them.

Look at the strength Jesus supplies

What amazes us from the past and even the present is how good Jesus was at supplying people with what they needed to live for him and to love each other with the love only he can produce. We are told, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

Your life has been surrounded by people who have molded you and shaped you because of their faith that was strengthened by Jesus their Savior. They were able to say in the face of adversity, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" I think of people we have come to know in the Bible who are brothers and sisters in Christ who are just as real as the people we have with us here this morning. When Paul was in prison and close to facing death he wrote to a young pastor named Timothy. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me, on that day- and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing." Paul was not boasting in himself when he said, "I have fought the good fight of faith..." He was boasting in the Lord just as David did in Psalm 118 when he said, "The Lord is my helper: I will not be afraid."

Think of someone in your life who has been there to lead you deeper into the Lord's Word. Think of someone who by their example showed you how Jesus was there for them even in the most difficult times of life. Think of someone who has been a blessing to you because Jesus was such a blessing to them. I think of being with my father in his last days on this

earth. I didn't think he had the strength to get out of bed after an especially hard night. He wanted to be helped across the room and sit at the kitchen table even though he could hardly walk. Then he asked for his Bible and his glasses so he could read his Bible at a place where he was accustomed to reading it. God's Word had strengthened him so many times in the past. He wanted one more opportunity to read God's Word. Jesus was there for him.

Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever. He will be there for us because he is the Vine and we are the branches. His blood washes you clean from all your sins of this past week and even your whole life. His strength is made perfect in your weakness as you bear fruit out of love for him. There are lots of changes in your life and mine but Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.