

“I Am the True Vine”

Last week, the scheduled Gospel reading was from the 10th Chapter of John where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² But a hireling, *he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.* ¹³ The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.”

This image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a favorite image among Christians, it is so popular, I have been told that the most common stained-glass window in Christianity depicts Jesus as a shepherd holding a lamb and a staff among a herd of sheep.

We take great comfort in the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We celebrate His shepherding us with His gentleness, we take comfort in His leading us in His way, and we willingly accept His love... or so we think.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus uses different imagery to describe Himself; “I am the true vine...” He proclaims. Before we get into the imagery of the vine, I thought it was interesting to note that Jesus could easily have said, “I am the vine.” In fact, when I started putting my thoughts down that is what I wrote, “I am the vine.” But Jesus says, “I am the TRUE vine.”

Why do you think He said He was the “True Vine?” We can get a clue from the second verse where Jesus says, “Every branch in Me...” We can gather from this that we can allow ourselves to be grafted either into the “True Vine,” or into vines that are Not True, those being the vines of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Thus there are vine branches that are Not in Jesus, and we surely have sufficient examples of these branches in the world today. But the saving grace is that just as a farmer can take a branch from one vine and graft it into another vine, so we too can allow ourselves to be grafted into the True Vine, we need only seek the Lord and ask Him to enter into our lives.

But being grafted into the True Vine is not sufficient. And Jesus tells us that this is so when He declares, “My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;”

You see, we are called, not just to be grafted into the Vine, or as the apostle Paul so aptly describes, to be heirs through adoption, we are called to be in Christ AND

BEAR FRUIT. Paul urges us in his Epistle to the Philippians, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, ... that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,...” And in Romans, Paul wrote, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

Jesus calls us to action and warns us of the consequence of our failing to live an active life in Him. For as Jesus says, if we do not bear fruit, God the Father, comes along and takes the branch away. He takes away those branches that are not bearing fruit, and make no mistake, the fruits of which Jesus speaks are those fruits that emerge from His Spirit.

So what are the fruits of His Spirit? You may want to write this reference down so that you can go back to it from time to time. Pencils ready? Galatians 5:22-24. Paul tells us, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.”

So the question for each of us is, “Have we exercised these fruits of His Spirit in all of our personal interactions?”

Have we been loving, displaying Jesus love for us in our relationships? Reaching out in love to those who do not know Jesus? Remember, God so loved the world that He “SENT” Jesus. God is calling us to be SENT. To reach out to the lost and bring them the Good News of Christ.

Have we been peace makers? Have we extended an invitation to those who are suffering in the world and offered to bring peace into their lives? And this not just on occasion, but on a consistent daily basis?

Are we long suffering, or do we resort to “payback.” Recall, the answer to the question, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother, as much as seven times?” By the way, if you are counting the times that you have forgiven your brother, ...you missed Jesus’ point. If you are counting, just waiting for the time you can say, “I’ve forgiven the bugger 490 times, the next time he sins against me, I’ve got him,” I think it is safe to say that in your heart you haven’t truly forgiven, rather you have gone through the motions much as the Scribes and Pharisees would do.

Are we kind in ALL of our actions and conversations? Kindness extends beyond our direct relations with others, it extends to what we think and say of others when we are not in their presence. It’s about being two-faced,

pleasant in the individuals presence, and talking negatively about that person in discussions with others.

Do we offer goodness to our spouses, friends, and neighbors? Offering goodness? Being a man who enjoys studying words, I paused and thought about this word goodness. What exactly is “GOODNESS?”

Proverbs 2:20 equates walking in goodness to keeping to the path of righteousness. Psalm 145 tells us, “They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness;” once again indicating that goodness and righteousness are kindred spirits.

Are we faithful to God as Jesus was? Recall that Jesus was perfect in every way, without sin in any area of His life. Can we claim such faithfulness?

Are we gentle in all of our dealings and discussions with our spouse, friends and neighbors?

Do we maintain self-control regardless of the circumstances?

If we are imperfect in any of these areas, can we expect then for the Father to come and remove us?

Thanks be to God the answer is NO.

For if we are bearing some fruit, what can we expect? Our expectation should be that the Father, the Vine dresser, will come along and do some pruning of our branch so that we may bear more fruit. Pruning can come in many ways. I have received pruning through my children when they were too young to use pruning shears. I used to be a smoker, and Joyce as well as our kids objected to the foul smell that they left behind in my clothes and on my breath. One afternoon when I returned home from a business trip, reeking of cigarette odor, our older son who was six at the time asked,

“Daddy, when are you going to quit smoking?”

I responded, “Well son, there is a lot of stress right now with work, travelling, and our move to Pittsburgh, and smoking helps me get through the day. How about I quit after we all get moved to Pittsburgh.” He said “OK!”

I thought I had him, he’d never remember my promise, and surely I would forget it before that day arrived.

Then the day came, I was walking out to the gate at the Pittsburgh Airport, smoking a cigarette. I had a partial pack with two or three cigarettes left and a full pack in my shirt pocket. Of course the plane's arrival with my family was delayed, but finally they announced the arrival. I crushed out a cigarette and watched the gateway door anxiously awaiting my family's arrival. Then there they were. The two boys came running down the ramp and lunged fully into my open arms. After giving hugs, my son pulled his head back and asked, "Daddy, have you quit smoking?"

With that, I stood up removed both partial and full packs from my coat and threw them in a trash bin and said, "I just quit son, you are all here." I have not smoked since, and I know that it was the Lord working through my son to prune me of that bad habit and that resulted in my being able to go from, a pack plus a day to none; cold turkey, no patch, no pill, no cigarettes.

And how is it that we come to bear fruit at all? Jesus says, by abiding in Him. ⁴ *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*

We are to abide in Jesus. Now that word, "abide," has some current day meanings that were not included in the Greek word, *meno*. The idea in the word abide is to stay, remain, live or dwell in. To abide in Christ Jesus is to follow His example of life being obedient to the will of God, and when we fail, repent and seek forgiveness from the Father through OUR MEDIATOR Jesus.

And Jesus promises that when we abide in Him and He in us, we will bear much fruit. And Jesus adds, "For without me you can do nothing." This nothing that we can do without Jesus in us is not that we will only be able to sit and veg out, it means that we will be able to do nothing kingdom related, that is we will not be able to bear fruits. It also means that if we are not abiding in Jesus and He in us, that we become fuel for the fires of Hell.

Thus it is a kingdom imperative that each of us be grafted into the True Vine, Jesus, that He may abide in us and we in Him.

Amen.