

John 15:1-5

I Am The True Vine

This morning you will need your Bible in hand. Much of our time will be spent in John chapter 15, but I will also ask you to turn to other passages listed in your bulletin. Now, as you open your bibles to John chapter 15 you will also see that chapter 14 ends with Jesus telling the disciples, **“let us go from here.”** (John 14:31) It appears that Jesus and the disciples left the upper room and began walking across Jerusalem towards the Kidron (kid·rone) Valley to the east. I can see them walking and talking and Jesus instructing these men as they make their way through Jerusalem. This would have brought them eventually to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. As they walked they would have passed the great golden vine that decorated the door of the Holy Place of the temple and this may have brought the image of the vine into Jesus’ mind. Also as they walked they would have passed the great walls of the city and vines grew along these walls. Vineyards, grapes and wine were an important part of Jewish culture. Jesus is walking and talking to His disciples continuing to teach and prepare them using imagery from the Old Testament scriptures and life around them. We know that vines were abundant in Judea and that the image of the vine had been often used in reference to Israel. The prophet Hosea wrote, **“Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit.”** (Hosea 10:1) Israel is the chosen vine of God and is to produce His fruit. However, Israel is no longer receiving nourishment from the vine of God and therefore is no longer producing God’s fruit.

As they are walking Jesus begins by saying, **“I am the true vine.”** This statement begins His teaching about the nature of the church and its fruitfulness. What Jesus

teaches here has direct application to us as His church today. The fruitfulness of the church and the Christians that make up His church is the result of spiritual union with Christ. Jesus is saying it is because of Me and you must be in Me and only when the church and Christians are in Me will they be fruitful. Are you in Christ and He in you? If so, Jesus does not say your life will be easy, but it will bear fruit for the kingdom. We are to be servants to the vine, Jesus Christ. We are to be servants to His church. We are to serve the people of His church and we are to reach out to the lost and share Christ. How, how are you serving? This is a serious question. Are you bearing fruit for the kingdom? Or are you a sucker branch that takes, but bears no fruit?

Let me pray for our time in God's Word this morning. Pray

The True Vine

Jesus opens this parable by saying, **"I am the true vine."** Jesus is saying He and He alone is the one, perfect, indispensable and enduring vine, which is the only true source of spiritual nourishment from God and will result in spiritual fruit. All other vines are but shadows of Jesus. Jesus as the true vine is expressing in the same sense that He said He is the true light. John wrote in chapter 1, that Jesus is **"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."** (John 1:9) Jesus said in John chapter 6 that He is the true bread of spiritual nourishment from God. Jesus said of Himself, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."** (John 6:32-33) The disciples would not have missed these references to Jesus being the true light, bread and vine. Israel is portrayed in the Old Testament as God's

choice vine or God's vineyard. The people of Israel were to be the vineyard of God and bring Him delight. I want you to see what Jeremiah wrote, please turn in your Bible to Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 21. Jeremiah comes after Isaiah and before Lamentations. Jeremiah wrote, "I planted you (*speaking of the nation of Israel*) a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?" Israel has run from God and become a wild sucker branch taking from the true vine, God, it is no longer is producing good fruit, but sour grapes. ²² Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord God." (Jeremiah 2:21-22) Any efforts of men, without God in their hearts, are but filthy rags. Now we travel to the Psalms chapter 80. The Book of Psalms is located in your bibles right after the oldest book in the Bible, the Book of Job. One of King David's musicians, Asaph (*aw·sawf*), who we know was a Levite and the son of Berechiah (*beh·rek·yaw*) from 1 Chronicles chapter 6, verse 39, wrote in Psalms 80 beginning in verse 8, "You (*God*) brought a vine (*Israel*) out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. God planted the nation of Israel and said it would flourish. As long as Israel honored God it did flourish. Asaph continues, ⁹ You (*God*) cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. As God had said it would happen Israel did indeed overcome tremendous odds and established the nation of God's chosen people. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. God's protection was over Israel and it became productive and the land produced much. ¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. Israel under the protection of God spread from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. ¹² Why then have you (*God*) broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The writer, Asaph asks why God broke down the walls that protect Israel and allowed foreign people to come and take away the fruit produced

by Israel. ¹³ **The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.** (Psalms 80:8-13) This is the only place in the Old Testament that it speaks of the wild boar from the forest coming to uproot the fields and destroy the fruit that Israel worked so hard to produce. The writer may have been looking forward to God's removing His protection as Israel slowly moved away from God. The nation flourished under King David and expanded under Solomon. The prophet Isaiah lived through the transition from prosperity in the first half of the 8th century to see the destruction of Israel. The Assyrians defeated Abram and Israel in 722 BC making it a puppet state of Assyria.

At the time of Jesus we find the vine planted by God, the nation Israel, which was to be fruitful, but which it is no longer bearing fruit. Jesus steps into history and His is the true vine. He was born into dry spiritual ground, but still He grew upright before God the Father. Fallen men despised Him because as God said, **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."** (Matthew 3:17) Jesus is the One, the true Vine and He will bring forth fruit to the Father. Jesus was planted in us and we were dry ground. Jesus brought forth spiritual life in each believer so that they may first worship God and secondly bear fruit to honor and glorify God by living as His holy servants. How are you serving and what is the fruit you are bearing for the kingdom? Earning a living and providing for you family is a good thing – but it is secondary to serving God. Raising your children is a good thing – but it is secondary to worshiping and serving God. Are you eagerly looking for ways to serve God, His church and each other?

Vinedresser

Continuing with Jesus' parable in John 15, **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the**

vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he **takes away** (*cuts off NIV*).” and every branch that does bear fruit he **prunes** (*cleans*), that it may bear more fruit.” We see in these verses that the Father does two things in His care of the vine. First, He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit. Most people would see this as a purging away of dead branches. They desire to have conformity with verse 6, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” When one looks at the Greek the structure I believe it would better support the verse 2 reading, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit God the Vinedresser **lifts up and cleans.**” The vinedresser lifts up the branches so that they do not lie on the ground. After all we know this is what a vinedresser does to the vineyard at the time of Christ and today in caring for a branch and in this manner makes the branches fruitful.

I believe reading verse 2, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit God the Vinedresser **lifts up and cleans.**” This is truer to the Greek and makes more sense and it is also sounder theologically. First, we see in the opening the emphasis in on the Father caring for the vine, God the Son, Jesus. A vinedresser does not immediately cut off branches coming from the vine but lifts them up so they are off the ground and better exposed to the sun, thus allowing the fruit to develop. Grapes cannot grow in the ground like squash, but must hang free. The vinedresser picks the branches up and stretches them along the arbor or support line. If we look at vineyards today the vines run along from pole to pole on steel wires. So the vinedresser or God the Father first lifts the vines up so they may produce. The vinedresser cleans the vine of insects, weeds that hinder growth. Today, instead of cleaning the vines by hand and positioning them on the wire the vines are lifted and sprayed with insecticides because it is quicker.

If what I am saying is true then God the Father or vinedresser gives Jesus the true vine to help people awaken spiritually and they begin to see their need of Jesus and to be devoted to God through Christ. Jesus causes us to fall in love with God and creates in us a desire to live for His glory and to fulfill His primary calling of serving to bear fruit for the kingdom.

Pruning

The second part of verse 2 reads, “**every branch that does bear fruit he prunes (cleans or purges), that it may bear more fruit.**” In our English language we think of pruning just as cutting off a branch. But the Greek means to cleanse or purge or purify. Jesus is speaking here of the Father doing the work of removal – removing everything detrimental to bringing the most fruitful harvest. God sent Jesus the Christ and then the Holy Spirit to do the work of removing everything that is detrimental from the Christian’s life. For us, God brings us to Christ and then uses the Holy Spirit to begin the work of stripping away bad habits, sins, wrong thinking and behaviors. Our priorities and values are reordered or changed. At times this could be the removal of old friends or distancing one from family who hinder our spiritual growth. One is hard pressed to find examples of human effort where the good lifted up the bad, but there are numerous examples of the bad bringing down the good. The examples of the good lifting up the bad, when examined, one will find not human effort prevailed but it was the work of God through a faithful servant that was obedient to God and His Word.

The order of what God does here is important. The reverse order produces hypocrisy. What happens when we go about lopping off what we determine are unspiritual practices without first drawing close to Jesus? We might think of

ourselves as saintly when in truth we are not. Then we look down on others who have not made the same sacrificial denials – denying one self of certain foods, pleasures, material comforts, etc. Without Christ we try and order our lives, fill our lives or deny our lives things that are not of God. This is how false religions began. It reminds me of the story Jesus told of the man who threw out one demon but then suffered even more when that demon and seven other demons returned to repossess him. His efforts failed because He did not have Jesus. Jesus builds in us a heart that loves Him above all – spouse, children, job and material wealth. According to the Word of God we are brought by Jesus’s death and resurrection and become the slaves of Christ and were are to spend our lives serving Jesus with a glad heart. Christians are called to a life of service. How are you serving?

When I first drew near to Jesus and He began the cutting away, the cleansing, the purifying was painful, but as I grew closer to Him and the cleansing hurt less and I became more fruitful because of Him. As one matures in Christ giving up old things – bad habits, old friends, old thoughts and behaviors, they begin to fall away without a great deal of pain for they shrivel up and die and fall off of one.

How does God the vinedresser cleanse us? There are two ways. First God gives us the Holy Spirit who indwells us convicting us of our sin. This happens as God regenerates our soul and we fall in love with Christ. Then comes, the continued cleansing and the maturing and the growing and serving which bears fruit. This happens by the study of the Word of God. It is the study and meditating on the Word of God that reorders our mind and thoughts and makes us glad servants. It is the Word of God that makes the old ways wither and begin to fall away. King David said in Psalm 119 so clearly beginning in verse 9, [“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word.](#) ¹⁰ [With all my heart I have sought](#)

You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. ¹² Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes.” (Psalms 119:9-12) Jesus spoke to His disciples in our study passage this morning in John 15, saying, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3) Nothing on this earth can keep sin from our lives except our careful attention to the Word of God. It is the living of the whole Word of God that cleanses us and matures us and enables us to serve and produce fruit that is pleasing to God. How are you serving and what is the fruit you are producing for the kingdom?

Abide in Me

The third point Jesus makes in His parable of the vine and branches is the secret of fruitfulness and that is abiding in Christ. Jesus says beginning in verse 4, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5) Jesus is saying to the disciples and to all Christians to come that we should live such lives that He will continue to abide in them. These two ‘abidings’ cannot be separated, and ‘abiding’ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness. No branch bears fruit in isolation. The branch must be connected with the vine to receive life. So to abide in Christ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian. Are you abiding in Christ?

Having been raised in the Napa wine country one observes that when a new vineyard is planted it is allowed to grow for a year and then trimmed back severely. This process is repeated in the second and third years. This allows the base vine to

grow strong and enables it then to produce good fruit. Likewise, there are times in our lives, yours and mine, when we go through periods of radical treatment at the hand of God – seeing little fruit and even painful pruning and cleansing. It is during these times we even wonder if our lives will ever produce any fruit for the kingdom. We can get frustrated or doubt because we do not see what God sees. We do not have God’s perspective on our lives and how He may use our lives to bring about His plan not only for us, but also for many around us. We must not get discouraged during these times. We must remember Jesus promises fruit in due time if we truly remain or abide in Him. It is at these times we must push ahead to study His Word, spend extra time in prayer and work at being close to Jesus. For us, hindsight is always easier, when we come out of these times where the Lord was pruning and cleansing us to grow us stronger we are able to see how He will use us in order to produce good fruit. How we live in these times is often a witness to others in our lives. We must keep focused and live for Christ in our desert times. We must serve Jesus with grateful hearts and serve others. How are you serving Christ and what is the fruit you are bearing for His kingdom? What is Jesus speaking into your heart and telling you to cleanse, strip away and prune from your life so that you may bear fruit? What are the distractions that need to be removed and then will allow you to have the time and energy to serve?

You Can Do Nothing

This brings me to the last point this morning found in the second half of verse 5, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” We have already seen that we have a desperate need to abide in Jesus and that as we abide in Him more fully we are able to bear the fruit of worshiping Him, serving Him, serving His church and serving each other. Jesus ends

with a strong point saying, “for apart from me you can do nothing.” This applies to unbelievers for anything they do, no matter how good, is of little value. What unbelievers do that has value is only because God uses it to fulfill His plan. This statement also applies to Christians. Through Christ we may do great things for the kingdom, if God uses us thus it is not to be to our glory but for His glory. Anything we attempt without our goal of glorifying Christ will fall short and in some ways is like the work of unbelievers. You can lay plans and you can tell everyone they are for God’s glory, but if the truth is you seek your own glory and even though you may gain the praise of men, in truth your effort will remain filthy rags before a holy God because your heart is not right.

This ending is humbling for Christians, “for apart from me you can do nothing.” God will use His branches drawing life from the Vine, Jesus to fulfill His plan for history and the salvation of those He calls as His children. It is exciting that we are to be used by God for His grand plan of salvation! It is also encouraging to me as I look at a world destroying itself with the evil desires of men against men. They may try and destroy Christ’s work, but their efforts will come to nothing.

The Apostle Peter wrote our orders for living as Christians in this fallen world, turn with me to I Peter chapter 4, beginning in verse 10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Peter 4:10-11) Are we, my beloved, living what Peter wrote here and are we taking to heart the word of our God, our Lord, our Savior and our Master, Jesus Christ who said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I

in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” How are you serving Christ to bring Him glory? How are you serving His church and your brothers and sisters in Christ? What is the fruit you are producing to glorify God?

Let me close in prayer for us the Church of Jesus Christ.