

"Christ Is Your Vine"

(John 15:1-8)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

Introduction: Easter leads us – the people of God – to a new life!

- A. The apostle John teaches of this new life in today's Gospel, John 15:1-8.**
- B. Don't be bashful about this. Sometimes we are self-conscious about speaking of the new life for fear that we will slip into legalism or somehow contradict that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, but the Scriptures are clear about the new life. For example 2nd Corinthians 5:17 proclaims that you are a "new creation."**
- C. I had a student once, however, who was convinced that this Christian concept is nothing other than self-talk or positive thinking. Why might someone reduce the new life to such a reductionism? Answer: because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is flatly rejected by many. Indeed, everything returns to *the* pivotal event of the Christian faith, that is, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!**
- D. And it is the risen Christ -- not a positive thought, but the Living Lord who conquered death -- who has all power to not only forgive our sins, but also to incorporate our lives into His and to join His life into us! This is why we preach, teach, and confess...**

Part I: The Fact that God in John 15 Describes a Real, Spiritual and Mystical Union Between Himself and Christians:

- A. Read John 15:5 where Jesus says,**

"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."

- B. Test question: which one is true? Is Christ in you or are you in Christ? Answer: YES! Both are true!**
- C. Our new life is an intimate union with Jesus Christ (He is the vine and you (Christians) are the branches).**
- D. To be united this way to Christ must yield something; it will most definitely produce something! It does!**

Part II: So What Comes Forth From This Union?

- A. As Christians joined to Christ, Christ bears fruit in and through you! Read John 15:2:**

"Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

- B. The fruit we bear as a result of our union with Christ is not ambiguous. St. Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 teaches:**

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”

- C. That is, the fruit of Christ is evident, it makes a difference in our relationships and in everything we do!**
- 1. In our first reading from Acts chapter 8 this morning we see the fruit that was in Philip who witnessed to and taught the Ethiopian eunuch. Because of the fruit of Philip’s witness the eunuch came to faith and was baptized!**
 - 2. In our second reading from 1st John 4 we read about the kind of fruit in our lives that includes confessing the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ *and* loving one another. This fruit shows that you have been born of God and know God.**
 - 3. That is -- again -- the fruit of God is seen and experienced; it is real. It is not theoretical. In Matthew 25, Jesus describes His people as having actually fed the hungry, given water to the thirsty, shelter to the stranger, clothes for the naked, and having visited the sick and imprisoned. These are real fruits...that you just can’t miss!**
 - 4. A Christian without bearing fruit is like a sun that doesn’t bear light; or a glass of water without the water...yeah, that’s right, it’s like a contradiction in terms...it doesn’t make sense. So James taught that faith without works (another way of referring to “fruit”) is dead (James 2:17 & 2:26). A Christian without fruit “doesn’t make sense.” That would be like a contradiction in terms!**

Part III: But Having Said This, This Does Not Mean That You Can Make Yourself Fruitful, But Christ Can and Does!

- A. You can’t get self-conscious or feel guilty and say to yourself, “Wow, I had better start producing fruit!” And then make yourself fruitful! Doesn’t work that way!**
- B. So how *does* it “work”?**
- C. Notice that Jesus adds a very important element to His teaching at verse 7:**

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

- D. His words must abide in us. His words contain Himself and His life. Where the Word of Christ is proclaimed, there the Holy Spirit works, and there Christ Himself is present!**

- E. No, we can't make ourselves fruitful, but by the power of Christ's Word in us, filling our hearts and minds, He works in you and He – through His Word – produces fruit in and through you.
- F. Is that it? No, not quite, because there is part of you and a part of me that resists the work of Christ in us, something called our "sinful nature"! So the Spirit of God through the Word of Christ may be leading you to forgive, but the very next impulse from your sinful nature is to say, "No way, not after what they did to me!"
- G. What does God do with that part of you which resists the work of Christ in you through His Word? *That part of you that acts like a drain of the new life and fruit that Christ gives?* The answer takes us back to verse 2 that we read above:

"...and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes..."

- H. Growing up in the central valley of California, I had several summer jobs in the agricultural fields. One of those jobs was to maneuver underneath the branches of orange trees in the orange groves. The job was simple enough – though agonizingly redundant and tiring – once you got past the low-hanging branches, you had to find what we called "suckers" growing out of the main trunk. These were unfruitful branches that at the same time were draining the tree of its life. When we found those branches, we were taught how to remove the sucker and at the same time not harm the tree any more than was necessary. YET, there was always a tearing-away of some kind! No matter how good I got at my job and no matter how hard I tried not to damage the tree, there was still a form of tearing-away.
- I. When the Heavenly Father prunes, we go through a tearing-away process as well. Our being cleaned through the pruning process can be painful to say the least. One of the more painful-sounding descriptions of the God-given gift of repentance that describes a form of "tearing-away" or pruning is in Matthew 5:29-30:

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

- 1. It is God in His grace who is still doing the pruning whenever He leads us to repent and to tear ourselves away from sin.
- 2. This repentance and pruning lead us to such things as to:
 - a. "Tear [our eye] out" by tearing ourselves away from that which we ought not be ogling at, and...
 - b. "Cut [our hand] off" by tearing ourselves away from any sin that our hand might otherwise engage in.

3. And in this pruning process we are reminded that the free gift of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life in Christ does not lead us to the permission to sin, but to the remission of sin that includes ongoing PRUNING.
4. And as this DAILY repentance/pruning takes place, we are – by God’s grace and again, by the power of His Word which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit works through – kept healthy and strong in the saving faith.
5. But never forget as Jesus taught, this pruning happens through the ministry of the Word of Christ! Consider these words from Colossians 3:5 & 16:

“Put to death therefore [there is that pruning again] what is earthly to you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Conclusion: We Are Really Led Back to Mercy:

- A. We read verse 7 above once, but here it is again:

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

- B. After what we’ve just considered, what do you think a Christian might ask for?
- C. Is Jesus encouraging that we think about our self-centered desires? For example: “I know! I’ll ask for that new sports car I’ve always wanted!”
- D. No, as we consider what this text is really about, we should beg the Lord’s mercy to continue to abide in us, to grant us His fruit, and to conduct His pruning to keep us clean! Jesus says that this will be done for those who ask!
- E. But more than anything else we should pray to remain in what His life, death, and resurrection has already accomplished for us!
- F. **Jesus became your vine through the vine that was the cross that shed the greatest fruit ever: that of His blood which covered all of your sins.**
- G. Jesus has already accomplished the greatest pruning and cleaning when He removed all sin from you and put it on Himself and this dear Christian is what makes you clean.
- H. Jesus has already made us branches, His living branches, when He raised you up in Him – the risen Lord – when you were baptized into His Name.
- I. On that day, you were grafted into Christ...made into one of His branches...and look at the fruit: it is seen here again this morning: by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Christ, you are confessing Christ, you are in the fellowship of the saints encouraging one another and all the more as the Day approaches, and most importantly, you are receiving the life-giving Word of Jesus Christ. Rejoice dear Christian even now you are being pruned; even now you are filled with His life...let us go forth now and bear fruit!