

## **Abide in Me, and I in You**

**(John 15:1-8)**

**Pastor Espinosa**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Alleluia! He is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]. In Jesus' Name, Amen! How often dear Christians – and how easily – do we feel completely drained? Most assuredly our cares and concerns weigh us down and our actual deficiencies due to our true weaknesses and limitations make us feel wholly inadequate. It is like we are always running out of power.

Our contemporary technology reminds us of this. My laptop has a battery, but it only lasts for about an hour and -- you know the routine -- before you know it, you've got to plug it in because it is about to die. How often do we do this with our phones? Just the other day there I was repeating that all-too familiar scenario: there is an important call coming in, but my phone was about to die. In that particular instance, my phone charger wasn't in my car. The whole episode raised the stress-level and produced a fair share of anxiety. The I-Pad needs to be plugged in, the coffee maker needs to be filled with water, the car needs gas...even "the Energizer Bunny" (if you remember those commercials) doesn't *really* go on forever...the "going, going, and going" eventually stops going!

Our Lord Jesus teaches us as much, but in application to infinitely more important realities. He says bluntly – and with the greatest love for you – that "apart from [Him], you can do nothing." (John 15:5) We need to hear this and we need to believe it. It isn't easy for us to do. In spite of all the examples of limitations all around us, we behave as if this really isn't true of ourselves (even though there is so much evidence to the contrary). But why do we act this way as if to live in a state of denial (even though we know that our limitations are as real as real can be)? Our sin of course makes us behave as though we are totally self-sufficient. It is our sin that drives us to live as if we do not need the one and only power source, even the Lord.

Jesus here in John 15 is using this rich imagery of the vine, but we should understand that when the disciples heard the imagery, they most likely already knew that Jesus was using that imagery in a new and different way. You see the Jews had heard about the vine before, but in the Old Testament it was in reference to the people of Israel. Israel herself – the apple of His eye – was God's vine.

Israel, however, in Psalm 80:9-19 was a vine that stopped flourishing. They too experienced their sinful limitation – their rebellion against God got them "unplugged" from the Lord and they lost their power -- and in this Psalm there is begging to God to restore His people; to re-energize them again.

The Lord had and has compassion. He saw Israel's true state and He sees ours and He knows that we do not have what it takes to be our own vines, our own sources of life and power. So in the greatest love and mercy He came to the Jews; in the greatest love and mercy He comes to you:

**<sup>1</sup>[Jesus said:] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."***

In this wondrous Gospel/Good News, Jesus our Savior makes it abundantly clear that He wants you to have not just an adequate life and power source – not just something to “get by” on – but He desires that you have the best: a source of life and power that never ends that comes from Him the great I AM, the Almighty God; the very Lord who shed His blood to cover your sins; the very Savior who conquered death for you. He says, “***I am*** the true vine...”. And it becomes quite evident in this Gospel that our Lord’s vision for you is to bear fruit, but not simply fruit, but to bear “more fruit,” (v 2) and to bear “much fruit.” (v 5)

Why? Because this is evidence that you are united to Him, the Life of the world! Jesus is the true VINE; the genuine VINE; and our true source of Life. From Him a living “sap” nourishes us to give us *His* life. In this way we are joined to Him and this is why we – as Christians – are called “branches.” And what comes from a healthy cleansed branch? The answer is simple: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit! And the “fruit” is also readily identifiable; the Word of God teaches us what “kind” of fruit the Lord is speaking of:

***Galatians 5:22-23: “<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”***

Notice the first fruit mentioned: love. It is what overflows from Jesus to you. God’s love for you is overflowing. It cannot be contained and there is no limitation. It flows from an unending power source. God is eternal. God is love. (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8 & 16) God’s love is eternal. He will never stop loving you in His Son Jesus!

But recall that I began today’s sermon with the sobering reminder that we resist the Lord as our source of all life and power. This is true of all Christians, because all of us have a sinful nature, also known in Scripture as “the flesh”...not our physical flesh, but the spiritual condition in us that causes us to run ***from*** God instead of ***to*** God! ***So thank God that the Lord Jesus does not leave us to ourselves!***

The Lord comes to do something about our lack of life...about our trajectory within ourselves to be fruitless branches: note what the Lord says at verse 3: “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” Jesus the Word made flesh, becoming our brother and our Savior, says clearly in God’s Word – and listen carefully – “Already you are clean” – this is a reference to the wonderful fact that you are already forgiven your sin; you are baptized; God did not wait for you to get your act together to try to muster up enough fruit on your own, but He has already made you clean by His love and mercy; by His blood shed for you to cover your sins; by His Sacraments which bestow His life-giving water and His life-giving body and blood!

At the same time – and not in any way contradicting what has just been said – the word “clean” is really used in two different ways in John 15. As I’ve already said, it refers to your forgiveness – your being declared righteous on account of Jesus – already accomplished, but again, it has another meaning that flows from this cleansing of your forgiveness. As a child of God – and this too confirms your status as one who is clean – our Heavenly Father still “prunes” or “cleanses” you. This is your new life that flows from your first cleansing...it is the second or ongoing cleansing that keeps you drawing constant strength, life, and energy from the Lord (and I am speaking about

categories which far-surpass mere physical or bodily concepts). I am now speaking of the life and power of the spirit united to the Lord...the spirit who continues to worship God; the spirit of the real Christian who is glad to know the love and mercy of God; the spirit of the overflowing child of God who relishes the Word and Sacraments of Christ, because these keep us alive in Christ!

But this pruning, this second or ongoing cleansing is not always easy. In fact, sometimes it is extraordinarily painful. Why? Because God when He cleans us in this second sense is dealing with the sin within us that remains. This cleansing means "confronting the sin." (Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, 274). And thank God for it, because in this the Lord is graciously applying His "corrective judgment on sin rather than a final condemnation" when dead branches are entirely taken away not because the Lord does not love them, but because they have removed themselves from the Lord's life-giving Word and Sacrament.

Which means this for the true branches (like yourself): by the grace of God they (you) believe in Christ your Savior and in this faith you also constantly receive Christ your Savior. And your being here right now is a powerful testimony to this truth. Your being here means that the Lord in His grace has brought you here to receive His absolution (the forgiveness of all your sins); to receive His Word into your ears and into your hearts once again; and to receive His holy and life-giving body and blood into your mouths (the true "fruit of the vine"); His very Body and Blood that makes you one with the never ending life that flows from Him to you.

This is why the Word of the Lord presents descriptions of life that are very different from our old, exhausted versions:

***"<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. <sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. <sup>30</sup>Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup>but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."* – Isaiah 40:28-31**

You dear Christian *have been* cleansed...and you are -- dear Christian -- *being* cleansed. Daily turning from your sin; daily turning to good works or what the Lord calls "fruit" (what He has prepared in advance for us to do, Eph 2:10); and all of this is happening because of His life flowing from His Word and His Sacrament...watch it flow from the Vine to the branches; from Jesus to you...the Word flows from His mouth as He continues to proclaim His Gospel: you are forgiven! The Word flows from the bread and wine; His body and blood even as the Holy Sacrament is correctly called ***"a consolation of all distressed hearts, a firm bond of union of Christians with Christ, their Head,"*** C. Triglotta, 987, 44 (as quoted by Lenski, 1033).

This is the union with you that Jesus is talking about as He says to you with the greatest love: ***"I am the vine; you are the branches."*** Your Vine...your joy...your life...you are "plugged into" Him so that now that you are in Him, you may also know His forever life...what a reason to rejoice! It is now something no one needs to tell us to do: let's go bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit!