

John 15:1-8. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The fruit is important

- 1. It demonstrates the life that Christ has given us.**
- 2. It helps us gauge our spiritual health.**
- 3. It attracts others so that they too may be connected to Jesus.**

Imagine in your mind a vineyard at harvest time. You see the rows and rows of posts methodically placed. The plants stretched out from one post to another, but as you get closer what grabs your attention? What catches your eye? It is the grapes. The first thing that you notice is probably not the vine, but it is the fruit. However, that fruit does not exist, that fruit is not there, without the vine.

The same goes for us as Christians living in this world. The first thing that many people see is not our faith in Christ, but they see the fruit that we produce because we are connected to him. And so today we are reminded that: **The fruit is important.** The things that we do in faith do not save us, but they are important, because **they demonstrate the life that Christ has given us. They help us gauge our spiritual health. And they attract others so that they too may be connected to Jesus.**

We know the passage quite well. Jesus says, "I am the vine you are the branches." However, a more careful rendering of the original may prove beneficial. Jesus calls himself not just any vine, but he calls himself the grapevine. Our Jehovah, our covenant LORD Jesus, is not some wild jungle vine, but it is a vine that has the specific purpose of bearing fruit. Jesus is the grapevine with the specific purpose of producing something beneficial and useful and good – grapes, bunches and bunches of wonderful fruit. As branches connected to this vine, believers are thus enabled to bear fruit that comes from Christ.

Jesus is the *true* grapevine. This word, *true*, is also worthy of a closer look. This word for true is used to describe something that is genuine rather than imaginary. Jesus is

not a hypothetical figure or the son of a made-up god that produces only mythical stories and lofty ideals. This is the true genuine Son of God who really came to this world, and he came to produce real genuine, true, blessed, and lasting results. Those who are connected to him are connected so that they may bear good fruit.

Sometimes the knock on Christianity, and going to church especially, is that it's not practical enough. What's the point of all of this in my daily life? Why do I need to come to church to talk about some ancient stories, some lofty ideals, and some invisible god?

We are not just here to talk about being Christians and then go home again and live according to our own desires. We are here so that we may be weekly reconnected to the grapevine, Jesus Christ, so that we may produce specific and beneficial and genuine fruit. That fruit demonstrates the life that Christ has brought to our lives.

Through word and sacrament those who were dead in our transgression and sins are connected to Christ and the life that he gives. In public worship we celebrate this good news. We hear the word and both law and gospel applied. The Father's word prunes off that which remains in us and grows out from our sinful nature. The law condemns and lops off those dead parts of us. The sin that remains that infects, that spreads; the jealousy, the greed, the selfishness, the corrupt thoughts and actions, the desires and the habits that have the capability to rot and destroy our lives and our faith are dealt with at the gardener's direction. We come here and the pruning tool of the law does its painful work, but then we are reminded that we are connected to Christ and his love heals and restores and forgives. Instead of the death and corruption and ruin that should be our rightful end, the grapevine produces in us and through us: wonderful strength, abundant life, and beautiful fruit. We are connected to Christ. Instead of death we are filled with life. Forgiveness from the son flows to us and through us so that we may forgive others. We are kept connected to Christ and his compassion and his love, so that we may carry out our duty of Christian love in very practical ways.

As those connected to Jesus we are daily changed and transformed so that we may live our lives as good neighbors, as a good husband or a good wife, as fruitful fathers and faithful mothers. We are reconnected and strengthened to the grapevine, Jesus Christ, so that we may be positive contributors to family and to the community. As Jesus produced so many acts of kindness we too are to live productive lives of kindness and love. Washed and cleansed by our God, our lives of repentance and faith now shine like grapes glistening on the vine after a cleansing rain.

And that's what people see. When a person sees a grapevine, it is usually not the vine that grabs their attention or catches their eye. In a similar way, our deeds of faith make our invisible God visible, don't they? Our deeds of faith demonstrate the life that Christ has given us. They proclaim the goodness of our God. The object of our faith, our God and Savior, changes our lives and produces beautiful and often very tangible results. This life-giving grapevine, Jesus, is essential to our producing fruits of faith and signs of new life.

This is a wonderful blessing of being connected to our Lord, but Jesus warns his disciples and all of us of what is the result, if we are no longer connected to Christ. A branch by itself, no matter how hard it tried, could never produce even the smallest of grapes. The vine is the place from which the life comes. Jesus warns his disciples not to lose sight of the importance of this connection or to take that connection for granted. After reminding his disciples of his forgiveness and love and salvation that they have received through his saving words, Jesus reminds his disciples to remain in him by using this illustration of a grapevine and its branches. ***You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*** Consider that, if Christ thought it necessary to warn his own disciples who were so closely connected to him, we too need to heed his words of promise and warning. Jesus says to his disciples then and now, ***⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*** The many good things that those disciples would be able to go out and do would be a direct result of their continual connection to Christ and his teaching. But even they were encouraged to watch out for the sin of pride or spiritual apathy that would separate them from Christ and his word. So it is with our relationship with Christ. It is vital that we stay connected to his word of truth and keep in regular touch with the power that he gives us in his word and sacraments.

This is a needed reminder for us all because we can very easily overlook that connection with Christ Jesus. We may take this relationship for granted, we may lose sight of the vine, and whenever we do that we put our spiritual health at risk. It is, of course, not just that we are Christians, and have been raised Christians, and we call ourselves Christians, which makes us spiritually healthy. No, it is Christ in us, it is a connection to him the grapevine that makes us strong and healthy and fruitful. It's that connection to him through word and sacrament that is vital for without a connection to the vine we are like a branch that by itself cannot bear fruit. We can try our best to be good people, to live out our faith, (and in the world's eyes we might look rather successful at accomplishing these goals) but if we are not connected to Christ in his eyes we are a branch that withers and dies. Jesus warns us, if we are not being reconnected and refreshed, and connected to his forgiveness and love eventually that faith that we have been given, the life that has been brought to us, it will dry up and wither. Consequently if nothing is done to correct this problem our faith will eventually shrivel up and die, leaving us to be seen by God as nothing but a withered branch that has no purpose than to be thrown into the fire and burned.

This is a strong warning that will make us want to be conscious of our relationship with God. Again this is another place where the fruits of our faith can be important. Often when we honestly look at our lives we can see the warning signs of how our faith and our life in Christ may wither. If we begin to drift from Jesus and his word, if we are absent

from worship and negligent in devotional life, we may notice that something is a bit off in our lives. We may begin to make poor decisions, and even the good things that we do leave us with an unsatisfying taste in our mouth because they are perhaps done for selfish reasons.

On the other hand when we see the fruits of faith in our lives, we can be confident that Jesus dwells within us. We can use that fruit of faith to gauge our spiritual health and remind us that Christ is in us. Our deeds of faith certainly cannot save us, but they serve as important evidence that we are indeed connected to Jesus. This was John's inspired encouragement that was shared with us in our second lesson for today. ²⁴ ***Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (1 John 3: 24).*** Perhaps it is seen in that there is a struggle against sin or in those efforts to demonstrate Christ's compassion and forgiveness, kindness and generosity. That fruit can be seen (as it was in our first lesson from the book of Acts which told us about the believe Lydia) in a desire to hear God's Word, to have our children baptized, to gather with God's people for worship and to encourage one another inside and outside this house of prayer. These fruits demonstrate the new life that Christ has given to us. These fruits give evidence that imperfect branches, like you and I, are connected to that perfect life-giving vine. These fruits of faith may not be exactly as polished as we would like them to be, but regardless these fruits demonstrate that Christ dwells with us and we live in him. This fruit is important.

And finally there is at least one more reason that the fruit is important, this fruit demonstrates to others that we belong to Christ Jesus. ⁸ ***This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*** Such lives of generosity and kindness give God the glory and they can catch the attention of a neighbor or friend so that they too might be attached or reattached to the vine. After all, while our fruits of faith might not save us, or save others, they may catch the eye of those around us, so that we might have a conversation about the One who really gives us life. As we have opportunity we can point others from the fruit to the vine, as we explain to our friends, our relatives, our acquaintances, and our kids how our lives of obedience and faith demonstrate that we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Our lives are blessed by being connected to the One who gives us life.

Yes, dear friends, the fruit is important. The fruits of faith in our lives demonstrate the life that Christ has given us. These fruits of faith help us gauge our spiritual health. These fruits that come from faith in Christ attract others so that they too may be connected to Jesus, that true grapevine. So, brothers and sisters in the faith remember daily the importance of this connection we have with Christ, maintain that connection through word and sacrament, and remember that he says to you. ***I am the grapevine you are the branches.*** Now, fellow believers let us go out and bear much fruit. Amen.