

April 29, 2018
Fifth Sunday of Easter
John 15:1-8

As I've said in previous sermons over the years, I always find these vine and fruit metaphors of Jesus somewhat troublesome to teach and preach. The definition of what the fruit represents is never clearly defined. It's pretty safe to go with the fruit equaling faith, because faith naturally results in the behavior Paul describes in Galatians when he writes; *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*

The bigger difficulty is to avoid turning the fruit-bearing into some type of legal imperative—you must get to work bearing the fruit! Seriously, *"Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away..."*, who wouldn't be thinking about how they can bear some fruit?

And even the Gospel back end of that sentence is a bit ominous; *"and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."* Being pruned doesn't sound comfortable, and then you have to bear even more fruit.

That's why these sayings of Christ are so tough. We focus on the fruit and in doing so we miss the forest for the trees so to speak. When we make it about the fruit, we make it about us and it's not about us, it's about the vine, Jesus. *"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*

Now I must admit, y'all seem to be doing well this morning hearing God's Word, receiving Christ Himself in the Holy Supper. You're confessing your sins and asking for His forgiveness and it is being done for you. It's good to be here abiding in Christ.

But "abiding" isn't just a Sunday thing. "Abiding" is an everyday thing. And abiding in Christ the rest of the week is a lot more challenging than when you're sitting here in church with the instructions spelled out in the liturgy.

Abiding in Christ is private prayer. Abiding in Christ is abiding in His Word as in reading it and hearing it and pondering it often. Abiding in Christ is thinking of Him, considering His will in your life decisions, both the big ones and the mundane. Abiding in Christ is living with Him everyday as your Savior, Lord and Master.

I just got back from Israel and you know what I saw most over there? Ruins. Lots and lots of ruins. What I saw was the relics of a people to whom God had made wonderful promises of peace, prosperity, success and abundance. I saw the ruins of a people who continually refused to abide in the Word of Yahweh, the God who created them and brought them out of slavery in Egypt. For short periods of time they managed to give God glory, but mostly they turned away from His Word and chased the power and pleasure of the world. Often they were willing to stick Yahweh in among their other gods or try to twist His Word to fit their liking. Ultimately their rebellion was the vehicle by which they fulfilled God's plan of salvation by rejecting the Christ and nailing Him to a tree.

Don't think we're not at the same risk. God has made and fulfilled His promise to us in Christ. We have been made His people by our baptism through His death and into His resurrection. But if we take that great gift and try to twist it and force it to fit into a worldly and

sinful life, we make a ruin of ourselves. We are refusing to abide in Christ and His Word, and our Holy Lord certainly isn't going to abide in our willfully sinful practices.

So how do we go about abiding in the love of Christ, the God/man who loves us so much He took on our flesh in order to die for our salvation? Simple. Seek to be doing those things that tell you and remind you of the love of Christ, the God/man who loves us so much He took on our flesh in order to die for our salvation! If we do this, we can't help but be abiding in Christ in thanksgiving for His abundant love and mercy. In this, we'll just be reacting in a way that Jesus says is the product of fruit bearing.

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

By this my Father is glorified. Ancient Israel became a ruin simply because they did not glorify God for His blessing and mercy but consistently gave into the sinful urge to glorify themselves. When we abide in Christ, we abide in the truth that God is glorious in love, mercy and grace and in thanksgiving give Him glory by reflecting that love, mercy and grace to the world around us.

So if you're worried about bearing fruit ask yourself this question, “Am I concerned about giving God glory?” If not, I don't have to ask you why not. The answer is obvious. You're somehow letting what God has done for you in Christ fall into the wings of life and the world and its glory is taking center stage.

The remedy? Return to the true vine; Christ the crucified. Pray to Him. Read of Him. Ponder His work for you and love of you. Repent in sackcloth and ashes and ask His forgiveness and know that what you ask has been done to you.

This is exactly what we're doing here each and every Sunday; abiding in Christ and His Word and giving glory to the Father...bearing fruit. The difference is that God's gifts in Christ are so front and center here, the true vine of Christ is crystal clear. Outside these doors there's a lot more competition, and a lot more vines claiming to be true.

So I'd like to make a suggestion. Rather than thinking of Sunday morning as the time you do the best abiding in Christ, think of it more as the blessed time when God makes abiding in Christ easy. He lays it all out for you in liturgy and song, the Word read and preached, the very person of Jesus placed in your mouth.

Consider the rest of life outside these doors the place where you must be intentionally in the Word, prayer and pondering the mercies of God in Christ. Often ask yourself, "Am I seeking to give God the glory for all His benefits to me, or am I grasping glory for myself?" Examine your daily routine. If you don't see "abiding time," change your routine and give glory to God.

As a child of God, consider your sufferings merely His pruning and your blessings His mercy. And when you look back over your week and see nothing but the ruins of sin and self-glorification, come with a repentant heart to where God has made it mercifully easy to abide in Jesus. Hear His Word. Taste His forgiveness. Be strengthened, and walk out those doors not a ruin, but a child of the Father in the kingdom of heaven; a branch of the true vine that is Christ, and abide there.

Amen.