

Fruit of the Divine

Text: Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-21 (Series B. 5th Sunday of Easter) Ps. 22:25-30

John 15:1-8

A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.

Prayer:

When I travel on an airplane, I am completely dependent on the expertise of the pilot and crew. I rely on those who design the airports and runways, the computers and navigational equipment on the plane. I am dependent on the skills of all those who manufacture and service the planes.

When I drink a glass of water at home, I depend upon the chemists who make sure our water is clean and the plumber who gets drinking water into the taps of every home in our cities and towns.

When I switch on a light, I rely on hydro Québec technicians, and inspectors, and of a vast industry of specialists. We rely on doctors, nurses, the pharmaceutical companies, and the Medicare system to help us stay healthy.

When you think about it, we are dependent on so many people. We trust them to do their job so that we can live safe and happy lives. When we go out to eat, we trust that the chef is providing good fresh food. We know there are times when this has not happened and people have gotten sick.

Captain Michael, a helicopter pilot was home on leave from oversea mission and was sharing his story with friends all about the choppers he flew often in very dangerous conditions far out at sea. He concluded by saying that his life and that of the crew depended on **one** bolt – the bolt that held the huge spinning rotor in place.

He went on to say the mechanics had named this the '**jesus**' bolt. You can see why. Without the '**jesus**' bolt they would be doomed. Their safe return home depended entirely on this one *single bolt*.

That is a modern parable of what Jesus is telling us in the reading from John's Gospel today when he says, "*I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me*" (John 15:5). You don't have to know too much about gardening and plants to realize that a tree, shrub or any plant as far as that goes, depends on the trunk and the root system for it to be happy and healthy.

A man once planted the best cucumbers in his backyard. To his delight, soon he had cucumber vines all across his back yard. The plants were green and healthy. One day as he walked through his garden, he noticed that some of the leaves didn't look as green as the others. Not many days later, some of the leaves were dead. So he followed the vines with the dead leaves until he got back to the main plant.

There at the base of the main stem he noticed that insects had almost eaten through the stem. The cucumber plant was dependent on the main stem for water and nourishment. Life giving juices flow from the main stem to the branches and enables delicious fruit to appear.

It's not possible to produce fruit without being connected to the stem. In a similar manner, as Christians, we need our true vine, Jesus Christ. When Jesus says, "*I am the vine, and you are the branches*" he is talking about the very special relationship that exists between him and us, between you and I. We are dependent on him for everything we need in our daily life from *food, health, family and good friends to love, forgiveness, hope, comfort and eternal life*.

Apart from him we would be like the cucumber vine with its lifeless leaves. Without being joined to the main stem and roots we would die. As Jesus said, "*If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you can't do anything without me*" (John 15:5 CEV).

When did this take place? At our baptism and faith is professed in the name of Jesus Christ. We might say that when the water of baptism was poured over us, we were grafted into the vine, Jesus. We were intimately connected to him and receive from him all that we need to sustain our lives.

We are connected to him when we come here to *worship*, and when we hear his *Word*. As we read it and study it, God's Word offers us strength in the face of new situations. We are joined to Jesus when we receive his body and blood in Holy Communion. We are refreshed and freed from the guilt of our sin.

Our faith is strengthened as we are nourished through God's Word and Sacrament. If we don't eat and drink every day, what will become of us? We sick and maybe even die.

Likewise, as branches of the true vine, Jesus, we are kept healthy and alive because we are connected to the source of life. The translators of the New Testament have used various words to describe this connection. Whether we talk of 'abiding', 'remaining', or 'being joined', one thing is clear being connected to Christ is crucial. It is the only way to a complete, and fulfilled life.

No one can get to the Father without him, (John 14:6) and he is the *only* vine from which the branches are nourished at least for Christians. Without the crucified and risen Jesus, the branches wither and die.

From the grape vine we expect a crop of juicy grapes. To be joined to Christ, to be a branch that is grafted into the vine Jesus means to "*bear fruit*". The kind of fruit that should be evident in our lives is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, acceptance of others and self-control* (Galatians 5:22,23). The fruit we bear shows itself in very practical ways.

If we are joined to Christ, you cannot look the other way when someone is in need. As a branch attached to Christ, we don't hold back our forgiveness, we try to be understanding and helpful, we want to be encouraging instead of being negative and critical.

Being connected to Jesus means that we will seek reconciliation instead of adding fuel to the disharmony. It means showing love and patience to those whom we think don't deserve it. In other words, being joined to Jesus has practical implication for the way we live our every day lives.

Bearing fruit isn't an optional my friends. Showing love, care, forgiveness, commitment to Jesus', eagerness to worship and to hear God's Word, is a natural part of being a branch attached to Christ, the vine.

But to have a good crop of grapes it is necessary for the farmer to prune his vines. Now I would like us to take trip back Kitzingen Germany, during my student days in Kitzingen, Germany, Kitzingen is located in the Main River valley a vine growing area, I was amazed at how ruthless the farmer is with his vines.

I witnessed on several occasions how the farmer cuts off all the unnecessary suckers, and leafy branches leaving a pile of dead wood on the ground alongside each vine. Pruning is essential for a good harvest.

If the farmer doesn't prune the vine and get rid of all the useless branches, the vine will look lovely and leafy, but the quality of the fruit will be poor if there is any fruit at all.

Jesus is saying to us this morning that all the useless deadwood in our lives needs to be cut away. We may think this deadwood makes us look attractive especially to the world, but will not in anyway help us to bear fruit that will brings glory to God.

To bear the kind of fruit that Jesus is looking for means to prune away all this foliage so that the Holy Spirit can cause real fruit to grow – the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience and self- control.

None of this is easy. We find it easier to ignore people than to help them. It is so much easier to be hurtful and critical than to encourage and comfort someone. We can't do this kind of pruning by ourselves.

Jesus calls us to abide in him as he abides in us, joined to him as branches on the vine. We will bear much fruit if we seek to prune our inner deadwood to clear the way for new spiritual sprouting. We need the Holy Spirit to help us cut out the dead wood of self-righteous and to grow beautiful fruit. That's why it is ever so important that we are connected to the vine.

The fruit we bear is not for our own care and feeding ~ it is to be shared with our sisters and brothers for their nurture and growth in a community of faith, hope, and eternal love in and with Christ as our Vine.

Whatever the season, we find our strength in Christ who keeps our souls rooted to produce the fruit of the Divine for us all. From the vine, Jesus, we receive the nourishment we need to live as his disciples.

From the vine, we receive the forgiveness we need for our failures. From the vine, we grow in our understanding of what it means to be baptized Easter people in everyday living.

We are still in the Easter season. Because the vine lives, so do the branches. The vine daily gives the food and nourishment to the branches so that they can produce a lot of fruit. Likewise, the life of Christ flows to us though the Word and Sacraments.

I leave you with the words of John Wesley 1703-1791

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you ever can.

As Jesus said: *"I am the vine you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit..."* the fruit of faith and good deeds.

May the life-giving sap of Christ's love make us all fruit bearing branches.

Amen.