

Sunday: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Date: May 2, 2021

Text: John 15:1-8

Title: Fruitful Branches of the Vine Divine

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

Spring is busting out all over! Fields have been plowed. Seeds have been sown. Gardens have been tilled and planted. Now comes the work of tending to our fields and gardens. We do this with an eye to the future. We look forward to the harvest: The corn, wheat, tomatoes, carrots, and potatoes.

God's glorious creation at this time of year brings out the farmer or gardener in many of us—for some more so than others! God's Word today speaks to each of us, whether or not we've ever done any farming or gardening. We know what our Lord Jesus is talking about in this section of the Gospel of John, where he speaks of the vine and the branches. God's Word is clear. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. God has created us branches to bear fruit. And his Word is clear about how this will happen: God is the one who enables us to produce fruit. He does that through our connection to the vine, who is Jesus Christ. If Jesus is a part of our lives as Savior and Lord, then fruit will appear.

JESUS, THE VINE DIVINE, WORKS A FRUITFUL LIFE IN US THROUGH THE  
CONNECTION OF FAITH.

I.

Fellow branches connected to the vine, what are some of examples of fruit Jesus talks about here? From other places in the Word of God, we know that his fruit includes the attitudes found inside us, described in Galatians as “fruit of the Spirit”: joy and peace and kindness and more (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit also includes the God-given ability to resist sin and the power to live a Christian life filled with good works in service to those around us. These are examples of the fruit Jesus wants to see in each of us.

In our congregation we see the works of God, in the gathering of the saints in many and various ways. When we support one another in times of difficulty and grief. When we celebrate the joys of life lived in fellowship with our brothers and

sisters in the faith. We see the fruit Jesus wants to see in our service to others. Service like the Betty Ann Circle. Since 1938 ladies from our congregation have sewn and tied quilts to be given to people they do not know. Thousands of children in the Tacoma area have received these hand-crafted blankets. Most of them going to families living in poverty including many children who were in migrant labor families. Others in our congregation have given time and talents to help people who are in need, much like what we are currently doing with the Wippichs who were displaced by the fire 10 days ago at the Forest Village Apartments.

If you were to admire and commend fellow Christians for their fruit-bearing, they would likely say, “Thank you, but is no big deal.” They might also say, “To God be the glory.” Do you know why Christians would say such a thing? Because their strength and ability to produce such fruit comes from Jesus, the life-giving vine! That’s why. In verse 5 of our text, 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.”

Then, Jesus quickly adds this warning: “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” (vv 5-6).

People who have big trees in their yards will tell you that, along with the blessings of big trees—their beauty, the curb appeal they give to the property, the shade they provide—they also make a mess. Seeds, leaves, cones, twigs, and branches fall. The owners often have a growing pile of branches somewhere on their property. Use as kindling in a backyard firepit is not far off for those branches. Or maybe burial at the landfill.

In our lives as the people of God, we don’t want to become like those dead branches. How do we prevent such a death, when it comes to our relationship with God and bearing fruit for him? Jesus makes it clear in our lesson today. The key to remaining vital, living branches and not becoming dead branches in the kingdom of God is to remain connected to the vine, Jesus and to receive life from him.

## II.

That’s why Jesus came to earth in the first place: to bring and to give life. Before Jesus came to us with his life-giving work, we and all humankind were helplessly dead branches whose destiny it was to be picked up and thrown into the fire. We were lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches! But at the right

time, even when we were lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches, Jesus Christ, true God from heaven was planted in this world. Jesus was and is the Vine Divine, and he came to bring life to us all!

Our heavenly Father had a most unusual plan to bring us life through the Vine Divine, his beloved Son. The plan for life would involve death. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would have to suffer and even, for a time, be cut off from God the Father as Jesus took upon himself on the cross the sin and eternal punishment of all humankind. The vine, Jesus, died. He was buried. But in three days, he rose from the dead. Forty days later, he ascended into heaven. And from heaven, Jesus Christ the living Lord, has given you the great gift of the Holy Spirit, who, through the tools of God's Word and the Lord's Supper, keeps you connected to the vine, giving you and keeping you in saving faith—active, fruit bearing faith.

What grace! What a blessing it is that, by God's power through the mighty life-giving message of Jesus Christ, you and I remain connected to the vine and we live forever! God loves you and wants you to be a living branch and his dear child now and forever!

This love of God for us ought to be so precious that we let nothing get in the way of regular worship and the study of God's Word—unless poor health or immobility prevents us from gathering with fellow branches of the vine for worship. You know that from the Word of God today you're hearing that life comes from the Vine Divine, Jesus. Please know as well that life flows to you through his precious gospel promises found throughout the Bible, for your reading any time during the week, and that it's given to you personally here in the Lord's Supper. So, you come here, or you hear and read God's Word on your own and with others, and you are strengthened in your faith. In our worship services, you receive Jesus' very body and blood in the Lord's Supper, bringing to you all the life-giving gifts of Jesus, including his forgiveness for all your sins and the strengthening of your faith. Yes, through his Word and the Lord's Supper, you remain connected to the life-giving vine, Jesus.

### III.

This faith connection to Jesus is of utmost importance. But there much more Good News! There are more benefits that flow to us, according to what he tells us today in his Word. These benefits are centered in the way his words shape our wills to align with what he wants for us, in two very important ways. The first benefit is prayer. Our Lord says in verse 7 of our lesson today: "If you abide in

me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Here, Jesus invites us to pray. This is a special kind of prayer. This is prayer aimed at carrying forward the work of Jesus. This is prayer based upon God’s Word and will. This is prayer that acknowledges, not my will, but thine be done.” This is prayer that trusts a loving Father in heaven to provide for our needs.

Besides a life of prayer, another benefit of staying connected to Jesus by faith is the delight of glorifying God by our fruit-bearing. Jesus says in verse 8, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” You see, Jesus makes us his followers through his words, and we in turn reveal that we are his followers through our fruit—our attitudes, words, actions. Knowing Jesus and living in him affects how we talk about others, where we go, what we do with our time, how we spend our money. We live with purpose and hope. Oh, we still can have fun, but this is the best kind of fun! People notice we’re a little different than others, and they may wonder why. We can say we’re different because Jesus is our Savior and God is our loving Father. We want to live a “thank-you” life to God; we want to honor him with our lives. That’s fruit-bearing that glorifies God.

And that kind of life is always in season. There’s always a harvest, for Jesus is the faithful Vine Divine. And as we are connected to him through faith, he promises we will be fruitful branches. God grant this for Jesus’ sake.

Amen.