

2021-05-02 – Rev Esmā Collins-Marks

John 15: 1-8

In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine which is about 1,000 years old. This grapevine has one root which is at least two feet thick, and some of the branches are 200 feet long. Despite its age the vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Although some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem, they still bear the sweet and delicious fruit because they are connected to the vine. Life flows from that single root and throughout the vine bringing nourishment and strength to each of the branches.

Jesus promises to do the same for us. He is the “true vine” bringing life to each of the branches. The purpose of the vine is to bring nourishment to the branches in order that they might produce fruit. When separated from the vine the branches wither and die. The vitality of our spiritual life is dependent upon our connection to Christ the “true vine.”

Jesus tells his disciples, “I am the true vine.” Jesus continued to instruct this group who had walked with Him for the last three years. Jesus knew that time was running out, but He still had much that He wanted to share with the disciples.

Jesus was a master teacher. He didn't talk over people's heads; He used things which were common to those He taught so that they could understand His teaching. So I believe that as Jesus and the disciples were making their way they walked beside something familiar to everyone in Jerusalem—a grapevine. In this way then Jesus can walk up to the vine and tell His disciples, “I am the true vine.” Now He had their attention; now Jesus was using something that they were familiar with and could understand as an “illustrated sermon.” Therefore, Jesus is showing His disciples, and us, that He is the source of spiritual life. Jesus is the source of life, a resource made available by the Holy Spirit when He comes to dwell within us to produce fruit. The question we need to think about for ourselves is, “How much fruit is being produced, is there no fruit, some fruit, or an abundance of fruit?” Anyone who is not connected to Jesus

cannot bear fruit. The quantity of fruit deals with the issue of what we are doing with the life source that is within us.

Some of you may be wondering exactly what is this fruit we are supposed to be producing. Some have taught that the fruit Jesus is talking about is obedience. This fits with the context, those who love Christ will obey His commands. Others have taught that the fruit is to reproduce other believers. One of the signs of life is that it reproduces itself. Fruit carries within it the seed which has the ability to reproduce. Others have taught that the fruit is the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is the fruitful evidence that you are connected to the vine.

Those who are Christ's branches should desire to produce more and more of all His fruit. That brings us back to the question of quantity. How much fruit is your life producing; is there no fruit, some fruit or an abundance of fruit?

A healthy grapevine puts out new shoots which grow into branches. However, these new branches often grow along the ground; they get covered with dirt and are shaded from the light of the sun. Although they are alive, they can't produce fruit. That's what a gardener does for the new branches; he lifts them up giving them the support and training that they need in order to produce fruit. God's Holy spirit is in our lives, but God does more to make us fruitful. God lifts us up; He disciplines and trains us in order that we might grow and produce fruit. So how does God lift up these fruitless vines? He places us in relationship with others who believe. We need each other to grow effectively and be fruitful; none of us can make it alone. I believe this is the single most important thing that God does for us. Being a part of a church and sharing in loving relationships with other Christians is vital to our spiritual health.

He instructs us in His Word. The Holy Spirit is our teacher; through our personal devotions, sermons, teaching and interaction in small groups the Holy Spirit will cleanse and strengthen our lives through the Word of God. God renews our minds so that we no longer conform to the ways of this world but pursue His kingdom; He teaches us to hate sin and desire

righteousness in our lives. When we have sin in our lives we want to be restored in our relationship with God and He is faithful to forgive us.

If we don't let God lift us up, then we are in danger of becoming a fruitless branch that chooses not to remain in Christ. If we don't enter into relationships with others who believe, if we don't apply His word to our lives, if we don't let the Holy Spirit renew our minds, then we are cutting off the flow of Christ's source of life that He places within us.

Not all branches are as fruitful as others. Some branches may have many kilos of fruit while another branch may only a kilo or two, and still other branches while not barren have very little fruit at all. The life of Christ within the vine is what produces the fruit. Therefore any fruit produced in your life, obedience, reproduction, or the Fruit of the Spirit, it is all good fruit. Christ's life in you will not produce inferior fruit. Christ, the true vine, only produces the best quality fruit. However, each of us, as branches, can restrict the quantity of fruit produced in our lives. What does the Father do for the branch that only produces some fruit? Does He cut the branch off and throw it away? No, the Father's desire is that each branch produces an abundance of fruit; that's not possible if the branches are cut off of the vine. What did Jesus say the Father would do? "But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit." So what is the Father doing when He prunes the branches? He is causing us to stop depending upon ourselves in order that we might rely fully on Christ and bear more fruit.

Jesus, the true vine is producing fruit within His branches. Christ's fruit is good; it alone will endure. How much fruit are you letting be produced through your life? Is there no fruit, some fruit or an abundance of fruit? Amen.