

John 15:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christ is risen! Today we look at another section from John's Gospel, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. 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. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

In our text for this morning, our Lord uses a word that, when we rightly understand it is, I think is both offensive and instructive to us. He talks about abiding. What does it mean to abide? Truly, our Lord uses a metaphor here for the Christian life that is instructive to us. He says that we are the branches, but he is the vine. Unless we abide in him, we do not bear any fruit. Abiding is a passive thing. The branches don't struggle to stay connected to the vine. The branches aren't constantly second guessing themselves to see if they are truly as connected to the vine as they ought to be. They aren't worried about whether or not they will stay connected to the vine. They simply abide. They just are. As the great philosopher once said, “The Dude abides, man.”

The problem is that we don't *want* to abide. Abiding is too easy. It doesn't require enough of us. The very thought of simply having to abide and do nothing is offensive to us. Our sinful nature wants to step in and insist that there is something that must be done in order for the branch to be part of the vine. Surely there must be something to do, right? We even try to couch such requests in pious sounding language. We hear people talk about what God "has laid on their hearts." We hear people talk about being "on fire for Jesus." In these ways and many more, the result is the same: an eternal quest to be doing something. And it is often accompanied with a very subtle threat that people should be able to see our faith by our works, or that we must be living out this faith that we've been given or else it is dead. But the problem is that such things create a noose of fine silver wire. We often don't even see it at all, though it is always there in front of us. When we do occasionally catch a

glimpse of it, we think it to be a beautiful work that's been placed before us to examine.

Until, that is, that we walk into it. In the undying crusade to bear fruit for Jesus so that he is pleased with us, or so that we can do our part, we run right into the noose that demands works from us and we begin to feel that imperceptible thread pressing against our throats. But a little pressure isn't a bad thing, right? It reminds us of the burden of Christ's yoke and so we keep moving, sometimes even beginning to move faster. And so, we keep trying to find what it is that we can do. We want to find those fruit that Jesus is looking for in our text today and make darn sure that we're producing them. But then the further we go, the more the thread cuts into our necks. Soon enough, we are no longer able to breathe. We begin to focus so much energy on just staying alive and continuing to move that we don't even consider that the movement itself might be the problem.

Indeed, the branches in the Lord's teaching today simply abide. They are just there. The whole reason that they are alive is because of their connection to the vine. And it is the vine dresser that makes these branches part of the vine, not an effort of the branches themselves. There is no way for the branches to create themselves or make themselves alive. But what's worse, it leaves no room for the branches to run off on their own to do something that they think they ought to be doing. No, they must abide there, connected to the vine. The branches only go where the vine goes. And often, as with many vines, the branches that exist already simply stay where they are and it is the vine that moves forward, producing new branches in the places where the vine goes, leaving the existing branches where they have been grown.

Indeed, the branch owes its entire being and life to the vine. It is the vine that brings the nutrients necessary to bring life to

the branch and to sustain the branch. The branch is entirely passive while it is the vine that does all of the work. The branch simply receives. In the same way then, we also are only in a position to simply receive the Lord's mercy, forgiveness, and love. And he gives these things out generously and without end. He pours out his graciousness on us in an overwhelming flood of his very blood.

Indeed, the branch is alive because it receives a share in the life-giving liquid of the vine. In the same way, our vine nourishes us with his very own blood. So that just as the branch is alive because it has a part of the vine, so also do we receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. His blood comes to us, becomes part of us, and connects us to him. We have become the branches of the vine of Christ, just as he said.

We are branches of the vine that died and rose again. Our Lord Jesus Christ shed his same blood that he nourishes us with

on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. We have been given life because he died but Christ is risen! The reason that we are not dried up sticks and twigs haphazardly shoved into the husk of a vine is that our vine rose again and so now the life that he has, he shares it with all of his branches. Yes, the life that we have now, we have because our Lord rose again. We have life because the Lord of life was not defeated by sin, death, or the devil. Rather, he reigns victorious over them, so that we have life and have no reason to fear those evils.

Yes, we live because our vine lives. And we bear fruit only because we abide in him. Even the fruit production is a passive thing for the branch. The branch doesn't sit around and decide what kind of fruit it will grow. The branch doesn't pick which kind of fruit is produced. Rather, the vine is the one that does the work by causing the branch to produce fruit. In the same way,

the fruit that we produce is produced by the working of the Spirit of God in us.

We do not need to fear and fret about the fruit that we are producing. It is the fruit that God desires to see what he produces in us. And sometimes, that means that we can't always see or know the fruit that we or someone else is producing. It isn't the branch's job to evaluate all of the fruit. The branch simply abides. The fruits of the Spirit are given, not cultivated. The fruit of repentance comes only as a response to the Gospel. When we are looking to produce fruit, we are looking in the wrong place. Rather, we direct our eyes to Christ who is the one doing the work.

And yes, there are times when the vinedresser does pruning. He comes and he removes parts of the branches that don't need to be there anymore. This can be a traumatic experience when we experience it. And when it's happening, we

can't know why. But the vinedresser doesn't owe an explanation to the branch why he's doing his work. Rather, the branch continues to live and abide in the vine. And the fruit that comes from the pruned branch is better, and sweeter than anything that would have been produced otherwise. But that isn't always clear at the time. It is ok for us to hurt when things happen in our lives that we don't understand and that cause us much pain and sorrow. When we lose a job, get a serious and frightening diagnosis, when relationships end, and any other countless sorrows that we experience in this life, our life is still found in our Lord Jesus Christ who doesn't abandon us to the depths of despair, but who holds us firm.

And there are times that branches may become cracked. There are times that branches are lost. That is not the will of the vine but is the result of other evil forces. There is a tree in our development that had a freshly budding branch broken in the

wind storms recently. The branch is still hanging on by a thread, but that is enough for the tree to continue sending nourishment to the branch. If someone comes and supports the branch and holds it up, it can be repaired and remain a part of the tree. In the same way, we also ought to support and hold up our hurting brothers and sisters in the faith. When they are hurting, when they are weak, we should reach out and help to support them, holding them up so that the vine can work to heal the brokenness and restore the branch to full health.

May our God give us the faith and strength necessary to simply abide in him, trusting in his promises of life and salvation. May we remain faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ and find peace where we are grown rather than thinking that we know better than our creator. And let us all love one another, and bear with each other in our weakness. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting.

Amen.