

Rev. Lynne Ogren
April 29, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
5th Sunday of Easter, Year B

John 15:1-8

Note: The sermon was preached from an outline while Kris Pederson created a painting, as noted by the accompanying photos. This document is provided for those who were not in attendance.

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen

Introduction

Throughout the gospels Jesus uses different metaphors to help us understand our relationship with him and with one another. Today he gives us the picture of the vine and the branches. As with any of Jesus' teaching pictures, we must always be careful about not taking the metaphor too far. Vines and branches are very different than people. But we can still learn some things from this image.

Probably the trickiest part of this passage are the words about pruning and withering and being thrown out. Sometimes whole branches are cut off and sometimes only part of the branch. The purpose of pruning is to direct the plant's energy into the parts that produce, whether that's a fruit or a flower. When I had rose bushes there would sometimes be branches that only produced leaves—and there were often lush and full of life. But if I wanted full, beautiful roses I needed to cut away the parts of the plant that were taking away from those stalks so that the rose bush's energy was focused on the branches with the flowers.

The same is true for our lives of faith. So today, we need to first remember that this passage is based on a promise found in verse 4: "Abide in me as I abide in you." Jesus already abides in us, making it that much easier for us to live or "abide" in him. Our second reading from 1 John says it this way, "God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him." Our life of faith is fed by the life of Jesus Christ who lives in us so that we will live for others.

We receive what we need from God and sometimes there are things in our lives that need cutting away in order for us to live more fully in the light of Christ's love.

Light

Everything needs light to grow. Recently I saw a news show that told about some farming techniques we could see in the future. They had a building set up with all of the perfect elements needed for plants to produce year round. There was no need for them to lie fallow for a season because there was no soil. They were being grown with just air around their roots. But the one thing plants cannot live and grow without is light.

The first verse of the song says that we are the light beams that come from Jesus, our source of life. In other words, we as God's children are the ways that the light of Christ shines into the world.

Branches of the Vine

The vine in Jesus' metaphor is the source of life for the branches. Jesus is the source of life for us as a community who is rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you've ever seen a vineyard, you might remember that many grapevines are planted in a row and the branches are trained on a trellis so that you can't tell where one branch ends and another one begins. Even on a single vine, the branches grow so that they weave in and around each other. Some are stronger and sturdier than others. They are older and may be traced directly back to the trunk of the vine. They support the thinner weaker branches.

Some branches are offshoots of those older, stronger branches. The same is true in a community of faith. Our members who have had more years and experiences that have tested their faith are a source of strength for those who are still learning what it means to live in and from a relationship with Jesus. The stronger ones among us train up the others as we all grow in faith together.

It can be a challenge to remain in the vine, to remain connected to and in relationship with Jesus. We might feel like we're too busy, too distracted, or just plain too tired to add one more thing to our lives. Maybe we have experienced a tragedy and God did not live up to our expectations. **These and other pressures in our lives will cause us to feel wilted.**

In some cases, something needs pruning. God may cut back the parts of our lives that are drawing us away from a fruitful life with God. Jesus calls us to feed on the word of life—his words that we read in the Bible, that we hear in worship, and that we meditate on with our in our daily devotionals. Jesus calls us to be in relationship with others who can love and support us in those wilted, broken times. All of the branches support and strengthen one another.

Serving God

When we are growing in love from Jesus, our vine, we look for ways to live and serve in the world. As we learn together in worship and study groups and in fellowship with one another, we also start exploring the ways that God might use us. **What kind of fruit would you like to see in your Christian life?**

Maybe there is someone you are struggling to love and you would like to become more gracious to that person.

Maybe you are sensing a heart for a particular need in the community—feeding the hungry, caring for creation, or providing a special service for children or the elderly or those who are hurting in some way.

Our Stephen Ministers didn't know they wanted to be Stephen Ministers before we learned about that program. But they all knew they had a heart for caring for others who are going through a difficult time. Maybe you don't know what kind of fruits you have to share, but you might know what gifts, talents, or skills you have. God calls us into bearing new kinds of fruit when we find a connection between these gifts and where our heart is drawn to give and serve.

Often we must learn and grow in faith for a while before we recognize the fruits—the gifts of time, talent or treasure—that we have to offer the world.

Gifts of Love

The fruit that God produces in us is meant to be shared. Recently, I read that many pastors say that true generosity is always or mostly sacrificial—that we need to give away something of ourselves. The verse that our singers just sang pairs giving with love. Again, 1 John puts it this way: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.”

We have gifts to share, gifts that were given in love to us by God, that are fed by God’s love we know in Jesus. **What gifts do you have to share**—in your family? With the community? With the world?

How might the church help you share your gifts? One of the most crippling words spoken in a church are, “We’ve always done it that way.” Now, there are often good reasons for doing things the ways we’ve always done them, but sometimes the church also needs to hear new voice, be introduced to new ideas, and learn how to minister to the people we have now. And sometimes that means we need to be open to trying something new.

Sometimes it’s the church that needs some pruning to allow for new life to take place with the people we serve—both within the congregation and in the world around us. All of that is to say that we want to know what your fruits or gifts are so that we can all share in them.

Members of the Body of Christ

This weekend our church council spent some time talking about faith formation as a framework for all that we do in our life as a congregation. We want people to learn and grow from a relationship with Jesus our vine, our source of life. We want our education and worship and quilt-making and Bible studies and fellowship times to be opportunities for people to live a life that is fed by the love of Jesus and produces fruit that brings that love into the world.

Back to Jesus’ metaphor of the vine and the branches—**what do the branches that bear no fruit and the fruitful branches have in common?** They are still in relationship with one another. They are all still connected to the vine.

Faith is formed through trusted relationships. Do you know someone who has grown away from the church? If you are a friend or family of that person, would you reach out and support that person?

Today we welcomed Brantley into the family of God. He is now grafted onto Jesus, the vine, to grow with us in faith toward God and love for others. May we each know that power in our lives and be guided by the Spirit into new ways of sharing Christ’s love with the world.

Thanks be to God! Amen

