

THE TRUE VINE**John 15:1-17****(Read John 15:1-17)**

INTRO: Right below the house where I grew up was a hill that was too steep for farming. On the south side of it was a farm field that our neighbor Crosky planted with wheat practically every year. My brothers and I loved it when he harvested the grain with his COOP Combine which we thought was so cool with its massive eight foot header. If only we had known harvesters would become like the one, much like this one, that I saw south of Loudonville with tracks instead of tires and a header so wide it was towed by a truck.

But I digress. I was talking about that untillable hill below my house. On the north side of the hill was a high tension electrical powerline that required that the land underneath the soaring towers and the cables between them to be mowed and clear. But that hill between Crosky's wheat field and the powerline was covered by trees, many of them old and gnarled – it had been there for a long time. Those trees were known by our family as “THE WOODS” Now that designation makes it sound like it was some kind of mini forest, but in retrospect, it was probably little more than a wide fencerow that offered active and imaginative boys all kinds of opportunity to play Cowboys and Indians, frontiersmen and Tarzan. Camping out in the woods added mystery to the fun as well. I mentioned that we played Tarzan. None of us were ever Jane, we were all Tarzans as we would attempt to climb and/or swing on what we called the “monkey vines” doing our best Tarzan yell (attempt it). As I said, we attempted to climb and swing. You see, they were never very cooperative like the vines the real live Tarzan had to work with in the movies. His were never connected to ground as he would swing through the jungle with the greatest of ease. Ours, on the other hand, did not swing, and more often than not, broke free as we put our weight on them.

Those monkey vines, were most likely wild grape vines like these. We didn't know they were grape vines because they never had grapes on them. At least none that we saw. They were 20, 30, maybe 40 feet high, but they had no fruit. They never had grapes because they were wild and uncared for. They were fruitless because they were unpruned and forgotten. They were good only for entertaining adventurous boys who fancied themselves to be kings of the jungle.

Our text begins with Jesus describing himself as the true vine. He is true because he has been cultivated by his heavenly Father. And unlike those barren monkey vines of my childhood, this true vine, Jesus, has branches, his followers, who bear fruit. That is, if they are indeed his followers. Let's look at that true vine.

What I just read from John 15 are some of Jesus's last words before the Cross. They are after the last Supper and probably as he and the disciples are headed to the Garden of Gethsemane where he would pray and sweat drops of blood and finally he would be arrested. This is also the final I AM statement Jesus made until he responded to the high priest's question “*Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?*” Mark 14:61b with “*I am, . . . And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.*” Mark 14:62. Which made the high priest lose his mind with rage because Jesus was saying, essentially, that he was God, the I AM.

So, this is the final message in our study of the I AM statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John and it is the crowning message because it gives us our marching orders. We are to be fruitful branches of the one and only true vine. As I finish this out today we will see that God the Father is the Planter and Cultivator. And we will see that Jesus is, as I just said, the true vine, truthfully the true Israel, because God's chosen people had failed miserably as spiritual fruit bearers. Jesus got the job done and set his disciples, that includes us, as his fruit and fruit bearing followers.

Let's look at what we can learn from this. First . . .

Pruning is necessary

- Floyd Filson makes this observation as he comments on our text, “*The teaching in John 15:1-11 that Jesus is the True Vine, and that his disciples are the branches, has given great comfort to Christians. But in some ways it is a sobering passage. The Old Testament more than once describes Israel as God's vineyard or vine but it also announces judgement on Israel for its sin of unfruitfulness. In the same way, in this Gospel the unfruitful branch is pruned off; unless the disciple abides faithfully in Jesus he will be cast forth as a worthless branch and burned. Even the fruitful branch must be pruned or disciplined (v 2). Abiding in the love of Jesus is defined as keeping his commandments (v10); only to the obedient life are blessings*

promised. These verses promise no automatic blessing; they set up a stern standard which requires faithful obedience to Christ.” (End Quote)

- Pruning is a necessary but often painful process. Grapes, which, as I said, is the visual Jesus is using here because it would have been a familiar thing for his disciples, need to be cut back in order to bear fruit. Fruit trees need to be pruned for best production. Roses need to be trimmed hard to make the most beautiful flowers (Tell about Daddy and Solly).
- Jennel Houts writes, “*Understanding this important concept helps believers to live fruitful and victorious lives. Jesus describes Himself as a vine and His followers as branches. In order for us to bear fruit (which brings much glory to the Father according to verse 8), we must be rooted and connected to Jesus. We must remain dependent on Him and resist doing things in our own strength. Why? Because without Him, we can do nothing—nothing of eternal value, anyway.*” (End Quote)
- Pruning is necessary because it brings . . .

More fruit and better fruit

- Billy Graham, preaching on the Seven I AMs of Jesus at one of his crusades in China said, “*When you receive Christ, He gives you the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit produces fruit in your life. What kind of fruit? Love. He gives you supernatural power to love even people you don’t like. Joy is another fruit. Joy in the midst of all kinds of problems and suffering. There’s peace. You have peace in your heart. And then you have patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. These are produced by the Holy Spirit. And you can live that kind of life with the help of the Holy Spirit.*” What Billy is talking about is what we know as the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. When we have looked at that passage we have been reminded that Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Gentleness, Goodness, Faithfulness, and Self-control are not fruits in the plural but they are all one fruit that must be produced by the true disciple. When we have the Spirit we produce more and better fruit.
- Pruning also gets rid of the dead, unproductive wood. Stephen Altrogge writes of this passage, “*Has there ever been a clearer statement about the life-giving power of Jesus and our absolute dependence on him? Just as a branch can’t survive if it’s not connected to the vine, so we can’t survive if we’re not connected to Christ. Spiritual life courses through Jesus, and as long as we’re connected to Christ, his spiritual life also flows through us. Isn’t that an absolutely mind-boggling thought? Because we are in Christ, the life of Christ himself flows to us and through us. We truly do have access to the divine, world-changing power of Christ. The opposite reality is also true, in that apart from Christ, we can do absolutely nothing of true spiritual value. It’s only in and through Jesus Christ that we can honor God. The implication is that we absolutely must stay close to Christ. We must regularly draw near to him through prayer, Bible reading, fellowship with other believers, and the other spiritual disciplines he has given us. Jesus is the true vine, and when we abide in him, we bear much fruit. If we neglect to abide in him, we’ll shrivel up spiritually.*” (End Quote).
- Here’s the point. A branch cut from a tree looks vital and alive for a while, but after a day or two, the leaves begin to wilt. Then they dry up and blow off. Being unconnected to the main tree cuts off the very life. We need to stay attached to the vine in order to stay alive.
- Finally, here are the “take aways” in this passage in three words . . .

Abide, Apart, and Ask

- As usual it’s not original with me, but it’s true. Many translations use the word “abide” while the NIV, which I use, has the word “remain”. Verse 4 starts it out like this, *Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.* In fact that word “remain”, is used **11 times from verse 4 to verse 10 – seven verses!** That’s how important it is.
- Maxie Dunham, commenting on the word “abide”, which is the same as remain says this, “*What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means at least three things. Realizing his presence, responding to his prodding and probing, and resting in his peace. Realizing happens through three primary ways: prayer, scripture and worship.*”

- Notice how remaining doesn't happen independent of Jesus, his word, or his people. We need to be in contact with the vine – we've already established that. But how do we do it? By communicating with him in prayer, knowing his word by reading his scripture, and by fellowship with other believers. We cannot survive without one another. And we cannot exist without worshipping with one another. It's that simple.
- The opposite of abide is apart. In verse 5 Jesus says *If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* Apart is a painful and harsh word, but straight from Jesus we see that apart from him and independent of him, we are powerless, impotent, fruitless, and even, if we allow it to go to the extreme, eternally fatal. Dunham makes this point – it's long but it must be said, "*Don't tell me that God is too loving to damn any person to eternal hell. That misses the point. God doesn't condemn us to hell; we condemn ourselves. Jesus Christ is loving friend and companion. He is Savior, who wants to be Lord. He does everything, goes even to the limits of the Cross, to graft each one of us to the vine, that we might be sustained and saved.*
It is those who refuse him, who deny or simply ignore, and by default fail to receive his love and life who are condemned by their deliberate refusal or failure to act." (End Quote) Apart from him we are truly nothing – that's why we must stay in the vine.
- Abide (or remain), apart and now the final word: ask. *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* John 15:7. The life linked with Jesus gets answers to prayer. When you are a branch attached to the vine, one of the fruits is productive prayer. G. Campbell Morgan says of this verse, "*Any prayer that does not react upon my life is not a prayer at all. The value of the union is the franchise of asking and the reaction of fruitfulness.*" In other words, we are in tune with the one whom we are seeking in prayer and because of that connection our prayers will only be within his will. (Share about conversation about prayer last week) We don't demand answers, we know the answer we get is from a perfect heart and that's good enough.
- And finally . . .

It's gonna take a lotta love

- Neil Young wrote and Nicolette Larson sang
*It's gonna to take a lotta love
 To change the way things are
 It's gonna to take a lotta love
 Or we won't get too far*
 And that's true, but not in the way they meant.
- Love is a central factor. Love is the essential command. And when it's missing it's not Christian. It's that simple. So Jesus proceeds with, *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* John 15:9-12. Love each other.
- Love each other so much that you would die for one another. The disciples didn't realize it, but in less than 12 hours Jesus would be hanging on the cross living that message out in real life. The essential message is that his disciples are to love each other enough to die for each other. That is the love that promotes his disciples from mere servants to trusted friends. He ends verse 17 with this: *This is my command: Love each other.*
- In Jesus's words, I AM the true vine, you are the branches. You will bear much fruit when you are remaining in the vine. The proof of that will be the love you have for me and for one another.

Conclusion: Well, it's been a long message, but I don't apologize because it's an essential message. I hope you remember how, back in the first of these messages, I pointed out in Exodus that Moses and God were having a conversation. God had just told Moses to go and tell His people that their deliverance was near, but Moses wondered how the people would believe that God sent him. In fact this is the conversation, "*Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?'*"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"
Exodus 3:13-14

Jesus is that same "I AM" of Exodus. And here in John he is now God the Son, physically standing in front of humanity, ready to be their Shepherd, their Door to the Father, their Life, their Vine, their Light, their Bread of Life, and their Truth. In the words of Jennel Houts, "*He's the "I AM"—the God of the NOW—ready to be whatever we need Him to be in our lives.*"

This is our God! The great I AM. Amen.