

Sermon Easter 5B
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon
All Saints Lutheran Church
May 2, 2021

John 15:1-8

[Jesus said:] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just 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. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

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Have you ever had one of those moments when you just burst out in a spontaneous fit of laughter? Pastor Kris and I have. There was a time when we were praying for and waiting for a child. And we had been told by several doctors it probably wouldn't happen, at least biologically. And so we went down other paths to try to start a family, and we kept praying and waiting for God open the door for us to start a family, to give us a baby.

So you can imagine that when he accompanied me to a doctor's appointment and the ultrasound tech told us that we were expecting *twins*, what kind of reaction we had. We just looked at each other and began laughing! We could not stop laughing for the rest of the day. We tried to call our friends and family, and struggled to get out the words to tell them our good news.

We were giddy with excitement. And then when that faded, we were absolutely terrified. The concept of carrying a child is daunting on its own. Carrying twins just increases the complications, and we were told by doctors that carrying identical twins only increases the risks. So it was a very quick escalation from a doctor's visit to an assignment to go see a High-Risk Specialist. We had to report there every other week, throughout the pregnancy. We'll never forget the way that waiting room felt. It was crammed with nervous parents-to-be, just wondering what they would see on the amazingly high-tech machines that could detect all sorts of potential problems.

Of course, each time, I expected and worried that they'd detect one of these potential problems. I'd sit there in the waiting room, just wondering what we'd see on the

ultrasound. And week after week, it seemed that things were going fine. But then one week, the ultrasound tech said, "I see something." And of course, my heart stopped. They told us that one of the twins had a "marginal cord connection." The umbilical cord is that crucial tether, the essential transmitter of blood and nutrients from mother to child. It literally carries the life of the mother to the growing child.

After a time of watching and waiting and praying, we saw that the cord connection did not deteriorate, and eventually was completely fine. But the experience impressed upon me how crucial and how tenuous that life-giving connection is. This week, Jesus "I am the vine, you are the branches...Abide in me as I abide in you." I now have a whole new understanding of what it means to abide in - to be connected to - Jesus. As branches of the vine, we are connected with him and his lifeblood flows through him to us.

When you think about it, "Abide in me as I abide in you" paints a very maternal image of Christ and the believer - we are literally surrounded by Christ, like when we were within our own mothers' womb. There's an Irish Prayer that says, "Christ above me, Christ below me, Christ before me, Christ behind me..." Just think of how comforting it is to imagine yourself completely encapsulated by the love of Christ. When Jesus says, "Abide in me," he's inviting us to live within him. When he says we are joined to him as the vine of life, it's like being tethered to the mother's lifeblood. When he says that he will abide in us, he's telling us that our life is fed by his own, nourished by his Body and Blood.

It's in Baptism, where we are tethered to Christ in this vital union. We are born again into life where all we need comes from Christ. We are made new in a life that exists within the life of Christ. This is why we bring our children to baptism. This is what we thought of when we brought Stella and Virginia to the waters of baptism. We would bring them to this vital union with Christ, the vine. To make sure that no matter what happens to us, around them, they will never lose the connection that gives life

Baptism is just the beginning! So what is the end? What's the purpose? It's To grow in Christ, and to bear fruit. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." The sweet, sweet fruit of discipleship comes from living in Christ. We are connected to Christ the vine, yes for our own life, to grow and deepen our own faith. But it's also much more than that - we bear the sweet fruit which also gives faith and life to others.

Gail O'Day asks, "What does it mean for the church to live as the branches of Christ, the vine?" It means that the fruit that we bear - the words that we speak, the things that we do, the decisions that we make - come from Christ, for Christ. I hear that and see that in the words that you speak, the decisions you make, the witness that you give, comes from Christ and bears witness to Christ.

And if we taste the fruit - test how sweet it is - we must test it by the measure of the vine: Are we representing Christ? Are we bearing Christ? Are we being Christ?

Martin Luther says that we are to be “little Christs” in the world. This can feel like a tall order, to feel like all your actions must be measured up against Jesus. But remember, that vital union with Christ the vine begins at baptism. So you don’t have to be fully developed to begin to bear fruit. All you have to be is connected to the vine. We don’t want a “marginal connection” with the Lord, the giver of life! So nurture the connection that nurtures us, and the rest will follow. Let God the vinedresser prune the branches that are not bearing fruit.

Cherish and tend to your vital union with Christ. Abide in him. Let him abide in you. Let him live through you, and you will bear fruit in his name. How sweet it is!
Amen.