

Lenten Midweek 5, 2011

Text: John 15:1-8

Title: True Vine

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Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus-

The author and perfecter of our faith,
The bread of life,
The Son of God,
The Door,
The Savior,
The Good Shepherd,
The Living Water,
The Way,
The Resurrection,
And the true vine.

Jesus is the vine. Jesus connects you branches to Himself, the vine, so that you will bear fruit.

So how does this work? How did you become part of the vine in the first place?

St. Paul tells us that you were grafted in. You did not spontaneously grow from the vine. You are not a natural branch. You came from a different plant, wild, weedy, full of thorns. You did not bear fruit on your own; you just grew wild.

And yet the vinedresser took us and grafted you into the vine. He took you from being a wild plant, and made you a part of His vineyard, so that you would bear fruit. Several weeks ago I was watching a gardening show and they demonstrated exactly how grafting is done. It's a fascinating process.

It's not an easy procedure. It's not just a matter of cutting off one branch and sticking it onto another. It has to be done very carefully and very precisely for everything to work, and for both plants to grow.

It begins by making the cuts.

The rootstock and the new branch are given matching cuts, matching wounds. They are both cut with an extremely sharp knife at exactly the same angle, so that the cuts of both line up perfectly.

There is a layer of cells just underneath the bark called the cambium, and this must be matched up exactly, so that the nourishment from the rootstock flows directly into the new branch.

If the two cambia, those layers of cells, don't match up exactly, the branch will not receive the nourishment it needs.

One the two pieces have been cut, and matched together, then the two are bound tightly together, wrapped with a rubber band, or something that will keep the two tightly connected. If the branch slips just a little bit, it will shrivel and die.

But after time, the two rootstock and the branch grow together and become a single plant. That is how it is with you.

Jesus has been cut; He has been wounded. His wounds match yours exactly. He bore your sin. He bore your sickness. He bore your death. Every wound and cut that you have, Jesus has experienced, too.

Jesus cuts Himself to match the wounds you already have, so that He will fit perfectly with you. You and Jesus match up perfectly.

And then Jesus binds Himself to you. He joins Himself tightly to you, so that you won't just slip away.

Jesus marks your skin with His name, His cross, in Holy Baptism. Jesus breathes His own breath into you, by His Spirit, His Word. Jesus infuses you with His own body and blood, giving you the spiritual nourishment that you need, and physically joining Himself to you.

Jesus actually makes you one with Him. Once the graft has been made, and the two plants grow together, you don't distinguish between the vine and the branches. It is all one plant. You and Jesus are one. Just think about that for a second. You are in Christ and Christ is in you. You are one.

Jesus connects Himself to you for a reason. The reason why Christ unites Himself with you is so that you will bear fruit.

As long as you are connected to the vine, you will bear fruit. The nutrients that you need will flow to you from Jesus Christ, and you will bear fruit in your life- the fruit of the Spirit, fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are yours through the working of the Holy Spirit. You can't take any credit for these things. As the words of Jesus dwell in you, the Holy Spirit will act in and through you to produce fruit.

That's the reason why Jesus has connected you to Himself, united with you- so that together you will bear fruit.

Fruit is a good thing. Fruit benefits the whole world around you. The fruit that you bear makes the world a better place. Jesus fills you with His Spirit, Jesus creates good fruit, in and through you to nourish and enrich the world.

Sin brings thorns, thistles and weeds. Jesus brings fruit.

As the summer progresses, you will enjoy the fresh fruits of the earth- strawberries and raspberries, peaches and apples, pears, plums, and many more. Think of the juiciness, the sweetness, of biting into fresh fruit. I can think of times where I've had fresh oranges in Florida right off the tree, or fresh mangoes in Australia.

Imagine what a bland, boring world it would be without fruit. In particular, imagine a world without grapes or wine.

Imagine what a bland, boring world it would be without the fruit of the spirit. Imagine what life would be like without love, joy or peace, where there was only hatred, jealousy and despair. All of these good things are gifts, fruit worked by the Holy Spirit through Jesus' branches in the world. Jesus uses you to bring this sweet, refreshing fruit to the world.

Now, to keep the fruit coming, sometimes the gardener needs to do some pruning, cutting away the dead, dying, and useless parts of the vine.

Even if you bear fruit, the gardener, your Heavenly Father, will keep cutting away the useless, the unimportant parts of your life, so that you will be fully devoted to bearing fruit. This means that you need to trust the gardener and His pruning. Sometimes things that we are very attached to fall by the wayside. But this is just to keep you bearing fruit.

In the end, God does it all. It's a Trinity job. The Father is the vinedresser, connecting you to Jesus Christ, the Vine, and the Holy Spirit dwells in you, working through you to bear fruit.

Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the True Vine.