

## THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

JOHN 15.1-11

As you can see I'm holding a bunch of grapes in my hand today.  
They look good and they taste great.

What looks good and what we see is the grapes.  
What we don't see is the vine or the scraggly branches that produced these grapes.

Nor can we probably even imagine just what the vine and branches  
went through to produce these beautiful grapes .

Well today we want to talk about fruit, producing fruit.  
producing fruit in our spiritual lives, both in quantity and quality.

Chapter 15 is part of Jesus' deathbed conversation,  
They are some of his last words to the disciples.  
So, we know these words are important,

Jesus speaks them on the night in which he was betrayed.  
He had washed the disciples feet, celebrated the Passover with them,  
and they are headed to the Garden of Gethsemane.

They leave from the Upper Room and probably pass by the temple as they head out of town.  
They climbed the hill to Gethsemane,  
probably stopped to rest, and probably made a campfire.

Ah, a teachable moment.  
In a vineyard, in the light of the campfire Jesus begins, chapter 15.1,  
*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."*

Why would Jesus say he is the true vine?

In Numbers 13 there is the story of Moses sending spies  
into the Holy Land to do a little reconnaissance.

The spies find this beautiful orchard of grapes.  
They called the place the Valley of Eshcol (cluster),  
The spies cut off a branch bearing a huge cluster of grapes  
and carted it back to the Moses and it becomes a national symbol.

You see, Israel was chosen by God to be an example to the world,  
to reveal to the world the character of God,  
and to be the vine from which the Kingdom of God was to grow.  
But because of their unfaithfulness, they failed this task miserably.

So Jesus is planted as the true vine,  
the real and genuine trunk from which the Kingdom of God would grow.

And those that believe in him, you and I,  
are to be the branches from which godly fruit grows.  
We are to show the world the true character of God  
that the Kingdom might grow.

Here is a great analogy of how it should work.

In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine under glass; it is about 1,000 years old and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. It is 31/2 feet high and some of the branches are 200 feet long.

Because of skillful cutting and pruning, the vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Even though some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem, they bear much fruit because they are joined to the vine and allow the life of the vine to flow through them.

Again, in verses 5 and 8, tells us that,  
*"I am the vine you are the branches.  
 If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;"  
<sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit,  
 showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

Fruit can basically be defined as good works. Titus 3.14 among other scriptures tell us that,  
*"Let our people also learn to maintain good works,  
 to meet urgent need, that they not be unfruitful."*

And Psalm 1.3 from the Message tells believers that,  
*"You're like a tree replanted in Eden (by the rivers of water)  
 bearing fresh fruit every month."*

There are outer good works of our lives that can be anything from helping hands to listening ears, from kind deeds to encouraging words, from nursing someone back to health to nurturing someone in the faith from saving a life to saving a soul.

And there is also the fruit of our inner lives that offer evidence that the juices of Jesus are flowing in our lives.

They are listed in Galatians 5.22-23, *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

So, how do we produce that good fruit?

I'm glad you asked.

With God's help of course because without God's help we'd end up with bitter grapes, a lot of frustration, and maybe even fruitlessness.

God is the Gardener, takes care of the plants, Verse 2,  
*"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,  
 while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup>  
 so that it will be even more fruitful."  
<sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."*

Let's look at the two things the gardener does, "cuts off" and "prunes."  
 The word for "cut off" should be translated "lifted up."

When branches and leaves grow along the ground they cover each other and then won't get the sunlight and warmth that they need to grow.

On the ground the branches and leaves will get dusty and dirty,  
and if it rains then they'll get muddy, and mildew will set in.  
They can't breathe, they'll get sick, and then they can't produce.

The branches are still precious to the vinedresser  
and they still have some potential.

So the vinedresser walks through the fields,  
finds the filthy and fluttering branches,  
lifts them up, cleans them up, and then ties them up to tresses.

So a proper translation of the first part of verse two is,  
"He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit..."

That is called disciplining or training the branches.

I got to visit Ron Loeschke, the vinedresser of vinedressers last week.  
He pulled out a couple of books and some internet literature about training vines.  
Then he showed me how he'd trained his vines.  
He'd trained them on an arch tresses, a wire fence, and on Carol's cloth's line.

Now, think about that training or discipline in relation to us.  
We're lost and spiraling down in our wayward ways.  
We're covered with by dust, by dirt, and by the darkness of sin.

But because we are so precious to God he finds us, lifts us up,  
cleans us off, and then puts us where we can get healthy and produce good fruit.

Let's look at this wonderful passage  
about training or discipline found in Hebrews 12.5-11

*"My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline  
But don't be crushed by it either.  
It's the child he loves, that he disciplines;  
The child he embraces, he also corrects."*

Isn't that good.

I'm sure you're heard it said, "I'm doing this because I love you."

*God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out.  
He's treating you as dear children.  
This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children.  
Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves.  
Would you prefer an irresponsible God?*

*We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us,  
so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live?  
While we were children, our parents did what seemed best to them.  
But God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best.*

*At the time, discipline isn't much fun. (We can all say Amen to that)  
It always feels like it's going against the grain.  
Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, (NIV-it produces a harvest of righteousness)  
for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.*

Catherine was unhappy in life and unhappy with God.  
She'd had a very painful relationship with her mother.  
Bruce Wilkerson suggested she needed to forgive her mother.

After some soul searching and listing five pages of grievances with her mother she could easily see that that was what controlling her life.

Through prayer and repentance she was able to release her bitterness to God. That in turn freed her mother and freed herself.  
Her comment to Wilkerson, "I can breathe again, I'm back on speaking terms with God."

So in verse two we learn the gardener lifts up and cleans off the branches and leaves, and then it says that he prunes the branches?

Pruning means to "thin," "reduce," or to "cut off."  
The paradox of that is, "less means more."  
It can be God or it can be something else that does the taking away.  
But if it is God, then it is to give you something more.

You see the grape plant favors growth over grapes.  
The gardener favors grapes instead of growth.

Grape vines and leaves grow fast but that growth is not always productive. The branches run and ramble, scurry and scramble over rocks and in trees, unorganized and undisciplined.  
They compete for the sunlight and nutriment of the soil to the detriment of all.

So, even though there is some fruit, the vinedresser has to prune those branches

My friend Ron, the vinedresser of vinedressers said he'd just cut down this big branch that had just taken off on it's own. It was growing great and had plenty of leaves but was singing the song, "My Way."

It was growing it's way around an evergreen tree. Not good for the tree, it was being starved to death. Not good for making grapes, they' would be small and bitter. The branch needed to be pruned.

The need to be pruned shouldn't be so hard to see in our lives. We're busy, busy, busy people. And in that busyness we produce some fruit.

The rampant growth of the branches and leaves are symbolic of all the preoccupations, possessions, personal rights, and people in our lives that are not necessarily evil, but they often drain precious time and energy from us.

Pruning even though painful, helps us reprioritize and energize. We can then focus more time, energy, and money on the things of God.

And pruning also reminds us of who is in charge.

Fifteen-twenty years ago I'd been doing a lot of clown ministry. Some clowns don't talk, they use mime to communicate. I remember I was at conference and I had laryngitis. I couldn't talk. I was a little anxious about that. I use my voice to feed my family and I like to talk. (I'll bet that surprises you.)

I was reading a book, can't remember the name  
But I read, sometimes God has to take something away before he can give you something else.

And all of a sudden the light bulb went on.  
 If I couldn't talk and had to give up parish ministry (that would be painful)  
 I could be in full time clown ministry.

We could go around to different churches and places,  
 Char would be the straight person, Jessi would sing, and I could mime the message.

That would be a good example of pruning  
 and a possible result of pruning to produce more fruit.

If there is some emotional or personal pain in your life, check it out.  
 If it is of God it isn't intended to purge and plunder, hurt or harm.  
 It is to help you conform and transform into Christ likeness.  
 It is to help you produce good fruit.

Ok, we've talked about cleansing and pruning.

there is one more essential thing that remains to be done to produce more fruit.  
 And that is that the branches remain connected to the vine.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out does it  
 but we way to easily forget it.

If we want to produce good and godly fruit, and lots of it,  
 we've got to remain connected to the true vine, Jesus Christ.

Webster says "remain" means "don't leave."  
 The churchy word is "abide."  
 Abiding doesn't come naturally for us, thus we need the command.

We hear it once or twice in this little chat Jesus is having with the disciples,  
 Verse 4 and following...read just the word remain with me  
 and count the number of times remain is used;

*"Remain in me, and I will 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..."*

*<sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in me,  
 he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers;  
 such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

*<sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you,  
 ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

*<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.*

*<sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love,  
 just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.*

I count 10 times and there is one more in a verse I skipped.  
 So, I think "to remain" is probably pretty important.

Now do not hear that we're cut off from God's love when we're not obedient.  
 It obviously doesn't help the relationship.  
 Just remember, God's love is everlasting, unconditional, Jesus proves that.

Think about it-you're shopping and you tell your kids not to wander off but stay right with you, and they wander off anyway.

Do you love them any less?

But by not being obedient we are cut off from some of the blessings, the rewards, and the results of being obedient.

Two mentioned in the passage were joy and answered prayer.

And know there are going to be consequences of our disobedience just as there are consequences when your children are disobedient. They might get spanked, grounded, sent to their room, or do more kp but the idea is to remain in Christ.

.That is why the writer of Hebrews says, 10.36,

<sup>36</sup>*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."*

How do we show our love to our parents?

I'm glad you asked.

We do what they tell us to do and we do what we know pleases them.

One of my favorite Mother' Day stories;

The mother's fourteen year old daughter saw her doing dishes.

She said, hey mom, "it's Mother's day you don't have to finish those dishes up today."

The mom was pleased and thought this was great until she heard, "they can wait until tomorrow."

Loving others is doing what pleases them and what they ask us to do.

It is the same way with God.

we show our love to God by doing what we're asked to do.

I hope it helps to know that no matter what your sin or what your circumstances God still cares and is concerned about you.

In Isaiah 49.15, God tongue in cheek asks,

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and walk away from the children she has borne?"*

*"But even if a mother forgets, (like that is going to happen)*

*I will never forget you-never,*

*I have engraved (carved, tattooed, branded, cut) you into the palm of my hands."*

Those hands we're once nailed to a cross.

Let's ask God to us those hands to prune us if we stand too tall, lift us up when we fall, encourage us when we stall.

Let's ask God to remain with us, to abide with us.

Stand and sing this prayer if you are able and if you want to please Him.