

**Easter 5 / April 28, 2024**

**John 15:8**

**“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”**

### **Bearing Fruit in Christ**

Before He went to the cross, Jesus spoke of His love for the disciples and His relationship to the Father. He said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” He and the Father, though distinct in person, are one in divine essence. He called them friends, saying, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down His life for His friends.” Soon He would lay down His life for their salvation. He said that as His friends, they would love Him and each other deeply from the heart. They would do this not to become His friends. They would do this because they were His friends. They would do this not as a demand, but as a natural expression of their friendship and love for Him in response to His love. As John would later say, “We love because He first loved us.” In this they would both show themselves to be His disciples and bring glory to the Father in heaven.

In our gospel Jesus compares the disciple’s relationship with Him to branches and vine. The branches live in relationship with the vine. The vine lives without the branches. The branches live because of the vine. Separated from the vine the branches die, are cast into the fire and burned. The branches exist for and because of the vine. Branches bear the fruit of the vine. Branches cut off from the vine are unable to fulfill their purpose, to produce grapes. Apart from bearing fruit the branches have no purpose. They have no value as wood for construction. They are good for nothing except to be fuel for the fire. Attached to the vine the branches produce grapes; fruit for the hungry and wine for the thirsty. Jesus is the vine. He brings meaning to our lives as our God and Saviour. We are the branches. He gives us purpose by blessing us to bear good fruit that fills and refreshes the lives of others. He is the vine. We are the branches. Abiding in Him as our God and Saviour He produces fruit through us that both testifies to our relationship with Him and gives glory to the Father in heaven.

In the natural world vines can become damaged or diseased, so that both they and the branches die. Jesus is not a natural vine, subject to disease, injury and the vagaries that come with the passage of time. He is the eternally begotten Son of the Father. He is the true vine of all existence. Through Him all things were created. In Him all things are held in being. He is the source of life in the natural world. He is the source of eternal life in relation to the Father in the lives of all who believe in Him. Jesus says many important things in our gospel. The most important is “Abide in me.” There is nothing more important than abiding in relationship with Jesus as our God and Saviour. We are the branches. He is the vine.

We might think the most important take away from this gospel is bearing good fruit to show ourselves Jesus’ disciples and bringing glory to the Father. Those are important, but they are the effect rather than the cause of our relationship with Christ. They are important, but nothing is more important than abiding in our relationship with Jesus as our God and Saviour. In Him we are the children of God. Through Him the Holy Spirit produces fruit in us that shows our relationship with Him and brings glory to the Father. Bearing fruit and glorifying the Father are possible only when we abide in Him and He in us. We are the branches. He is the vine.

Sometimes people are so busy doing things for Jesus that they don’t have time for Jesus. First, Jesus doesn’t need us to do anything for Him. He does everything for us. He graciously gives us salvation and a share in the work He is doing. He blesses us to produce good fruit as an expression of His love for us and His word in us. Secondly and most importantly, we can’t do anything for Jesus. He works in and through us. There is nothing more important than our time with Jesus. To be too busy to have time for Jesus is like saying we are too busy to stop to refuel our vehicle. Even as the fuel empowers the vehicle, so Jesus empowers us to live in Him and for Him. We are the branches. He is the vine.

Jesus wanted the disciples to bear good fruit, show themselves His disciples and bring glory to the Father. They would do this first and foremost by abiding in Him. Jesus loves us so much that He gives us a share in His work of salvation, not by atoning for sins, He did that Himself, but by sharing the atonement He made on the cross with others. He doesn’t need us to do this, as if He were in some way dependant on us. He wants us to do this because He has joined us to Himself as branches to the vine. He loves us and want us to share in the labour of His love by sharing His salvation with others. He blesses us with the privilege of sharing His love and forgiveness with others through our words and by our actions. He is the vine. He abides in us and when we abide in Him, He produces good fruit in our lives that both shows us to be His disciples and gives glory to the heavenly Father. We are the branches. He is the vine.

Jesus wants us to bear fruit. He says the Father cuts off fruitless branches. He says the Father trims the branches, cutting away what is unfruitful, so the branches will bear more fruit. Bearing fruit is important to God. In the parable of the vineyard, the Lord laments that when He looked for good fruit from the people of Israel, He found bad fruit instead. John the baptizer proclaimed a baptism of repentance. He warned the religiously observant people not to base their relationship with God on their biological descent from Abraham. He told them to bear the fruit of repentance. He said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Jesus told the parable of the fruitless tree, which the owner commanded the gardener to cut down since it was just wasting good soil. Jesus cursed a fruitless tree during Holy Week as a warning to Israel to produce the fruits of repentance and receive Him as their Saviour and King. Clearly bearing fruit has great importance in our life in Christ.

Fruits are important, but we need to know what good fruit is, how it is produced and who produces it. In the letter to the Galatians St. Paul writes about the nature of good fruit, saying, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." The fruit of the Spirit is a little mundane, nothing flashy, just wholesome living. The fruit of the sinful nature is more colourful. He writes, "The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these." The fruits of the sinful nature are obvious even to the world in bondage to sin, enslaved to the devil and his desires.

Paul says those things should not even be mentioned among believers, let alone tolerated and openly practiced. However, fruit pleasing to God is more than avoiding the fruits of darkness. Good fruit is the natural result of living in relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus. People without God in Christ can do things that are morally good and hate things that are morally evil. But moral goodness is only fruit pleasing to God, when it is done through a living relationship with Christ. He is the vine. We are the branches. Apart from Him we can do nothing. Apart from Him no one can produce fruit that is pleasing to God. In Him the Holy Spirit produces fruit that both glorifies the Father and shows us to be His disciples. Good fruit is the result of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those who believe in Jesus as their God and Saviour. We are the branches. He is the vine.

In our gospel Jesus says, "Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you." The most important thing in our lives in Christ is the word of Christ. It is the power by which we are in Christ. It is the power by which we live in Christ. We are in Christ because of the word by which He called us to Himself, cleansed us of our sins and joined us to Himself in His death and resurrection. We produce fruit in Christ as a function of the power of His word. His word is power! In Isaiah the Lord said, "The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty. It will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Jesus said, "the words that I speak to you are spirit and life." We depart from Christ and His Spirit when we depart from His word. We abide in Christ and He abides us, when we abide in His word. Nothing is more important than being in the word. When we abide in His word the Holy Spirit nourishes our faith and produces good fruit in our lives that both shows our relationship with Jesus and brings glory to the heavenly Father. We are the branches. He is the vine. God grant that as He abides us we may abide in Him to life everlasting. In Jesus' Name. Amen