

Sermon for May 2, 2021

Spring is working hard to bust out! Despite the recent cold temps and the cloudy weather and even some April snow sprinkles, the trees are budding, the robins have returned, and we've even got some baby carrots starting to pop up in our garden.

God's glorious creation at this time of the year brings out the farmer or gardener in many of us—for some more so than others! God's Word today speaks to each of us, whether or not we've ever done any farming or gardening. We know what our Lord Jesus is talking about in today's Easter season Gospel where he speaks of the vine and the branches. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. God has created us branches to bear fruit. And his Word is clear about how this will happen: God is the one who enables us to produce fruit. He does that through our connection to the vine, who is Jesus Christ. If Jesus is a part of our lives as Savior and Lord, then fruit will appear.

What are some examples of the fruit Jesus talks about here? From other places in the Word of God, we know that this fruit includes the attitudes found inside us, described in Galatians as "fruit of the Spirit": joy and peace and kindness and more (Galatians 5:22–23). This fruit also includes the God-given ability to resist sin and the power to live a Christian life filled with good works in service to those around us.

If you were to admire and commend fellow Christians for their fruit-bearing, they would likely say, "Thank you, but it's no big deal." They might also say, "To God be the glory." Do you know why Christians would say such a thing? Because their strength and ability to produce such fruit comes from Jesus, the life-giving vine! Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

Then, Jesus quickly adds this warning: "Apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."

People who have big trees in their yards will tell you that, along with the blessings of big trees—their beauty, the curb appeal they give to the property, the shade they provide—they also make a mess. Seeds, leaves, twigs, and branches fall. What a mess they make in the fall, especially by clogging up the gutters on your roof. The owners often have a growing pile of branches somewhere on their property. Use as kindling in a backyard fire pit is not far off for those branches. Or maybe burial at the city dump. And speaking of that, have you ever seen the "dead branch section" at the dump? It's not a pretty sight!

Who would want to become like those dead branches? So, how do you keep from becoming like that? Jesus makes it as clear as clear can be - remain connected to the vine, Jesus!

As a vine is to its branches, Jesus comes to bring life and to give life. And He knows to do it at just the right time - when He finds us lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches.

From the stump of Jesse, comes the Vine. We hear it at Christmas, and we see it in Easter. The Vine planted among lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branches, for them to be wrapped around a cross, and then becoming lifeless and dead Himself, in three days bursts into an Easter spring unlike any other.

It happened for one reason – to bring and give you as a lifeless, fruitless, worthless, dead-in-sin branch, a new life, a worthwhile life, to become and to be an alive in grace and mercy fruit bearing branch!

There is one word in today's Easter Gospel which will you keep you alive and bearing fruit – *abide*! Seven times in these eight verses Jesus says: “Abide in Me, and I in you...Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing...If anyone does not abide in Me he is thrown away like a branch and withers...If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

What grace! What a blessing it is that, by God's power through the mighty life-giving message of Jesus Christ, you and I remain connected to the vine and have life simply be abiding! Jesus choosing to abide with you and you abiding with Him!

Easier said than done? Not if you love and crave what He loves and craves to provide you with – worshipping Him with other branches; digging into His Word with other branches who have been planting themselves into it. For those who are in poor health and can't get around like us other branches, what a blessing it is to have the technology we have today to keep them alive and fruit-bearing.

If it's not easy for you, our Vine has sure made it simple. There is nothing complicated about being kept alive by hearing and reading God's Word, here, or virtually, and on your own and with others. There's nothing complicated about being kept alive with simple bread and wine which the Vine says is so much more by His doing – making it to be His body and His blood to keep you alive with His forgiveness. There is nothing complicated about simply abiding, dwelling, residing, remaining in these His Vine-giving means of grace.

And with it comes a promise – take it as the Vine's guarantee to you as His abiding branch: “If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

What would you expect abiding branches to be wishing for? A new car? A new home? A new job? The fountain of youth? How about the Vine promising to abide and remain ever faithful to you, His branch? How about that it would be His Word that would continue to be the source of life everlasting? How about His promise to keep you from wanting – “I shall not want” so long as I abide with You, my Shepherd Vine and You abiding with me? How about wishing that it wouldn't be my will that is done, but Thine – the Vine's will – I would always be able to count on being done?

“By this,” Jesus the True Vine promises, “My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.” The only proving that needs to be done is the proof you receive as you continue to abide in Christ by abiding in His Word, by abiding in His Supper, by abiding in the Easter shower He delivered to you in your baptism, so that the fruit you would keep bearing will prove to everyone who knows you it's not you, the Branch, but it is Christ the Vine that is glorifying God through you.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow – the best being the Vine, Jesus, flowing through you and me. Amen!