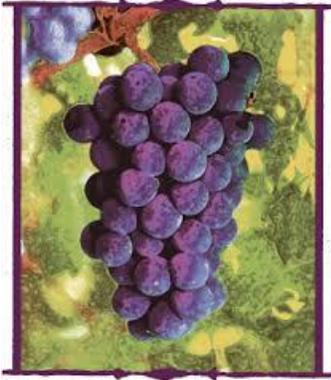


Sermon - April 10, 2016 - Easter 3

## I Am the True Vine

John 15 and Acts 9:1–22



Dear Friends in Christ,

Our meditation this morning is based on the Gospel of John chapter 15 and the lesson from the Book of Acts where we are told how our Lord chooses Saul, who was a harsh persecutor of Christians, to be his chosen apostle to carry the Gospel of Christ to the nations, to give fruits, fruits that spring up because of the true Vine.

We have been meditating on the words of Jesus when he said "I Am." Several times in the Gospels we hear him say "I Am." On Easter Sunday we hear him saying I Am the Resurrection and the Life." Then Last Sunday we heard him saying "I Am" the Light." And today we hear Jesus say "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

He is the Vine and we are the brunches, and he wants his disciples to remain in him, that's his deep desire and his passion for each one of us. We see that passion and desire if we take in consideration when it was that Jesus said these words.

Jesus spoke these words after he instituted the Lord's Supper. On the night when he was betrayed! Now, imagine this, it the last time Jesus eats with his disciples before his suffering and death. And he imparts them sort of the last words, last lessons before his death, clear and plain words and teachings. Even his disciples then recognized them, saying: "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!" (John 16:29)

And one of the last lessons is this: "I am the vine" he said, and "you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Now, why is being connected to the vine so important? Because a detached brunch cannot give fruits, not even survive. And the tree or the vine where that brunch needs to be attached to also plays an important role. A tree that is not cared for, fertilized, and alive, will not give life to a dried up brunch either.

But Jesus is like a vine, a tree of life that is in good soil; it has fertilizer, and is well watered, which is going to bear fruit, looks good, looks like it should.

Now, us on the other hand, we look like dried up brunches, with no hopes of fruits not even hopes of spring leaves coming out of them, until, until we are grafted to the vine, then only then fruits will start to grow. Paul's case is an example. He was a fierce persecutor of the church, but when Jesus gave him a new life, when he grafted Saul to him, only then his eyes were open, his life chanced and only then fruits begun to appear. And what is more he became one of the greatest apostles and evangelists, but in order for him to remains so he needed to remain attached to the vine. Likewise we need to desire, to make a point of wanting to be, to remain in the vine. In the true vine that is, because there are false vines as well.

When Jesus said "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) it implies that there are false vines as well and that more often than not we attach ourselves to them providing no life and no good fruits.

If you're thinking something like this: "If I can make more money and can climb up the company ladder, then I'm a winner." Then you might be attached to the wrong vine. Or what if you are claiming the social status, or claiming that you "wear the right things, got the right technology in your pocket. What if I have the Iphone 6s, or the SE. Heaven forbid I have a 5S because that's old school. What if I have the largest amount of friends on FB, well, I would have made it!" Jesus would say, "Not really!" Or, what if we would have the appearance of looking cool that we are good, that everything is ok, that we have the perfect home, we want people to think we've got it all together, not matter if our house, our family is falling apart.

But we would like to have the perfect house, the perfect amount of children, white picket fence, the perfect yard, the well taken cared lawn and the dog that never barks. Wouldn't that count for fruits? Jesus would say "that's no fruit" "you are attached to the wrong and false vine."

Now if those things are not the fruits God requires, what are they then?

In Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter 5, we hear that "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control..."

Those are the fruits that we need to produce, and in fact those are the fruits that we desire, don't we. Yes, I want to have "Kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control."

That's the kind of fruit that Jesus says that we will bear. It is the kind of fruit that when you are attached to the vine will produce. Own our own, we can't, in fact the only thing we produce is excuse, yes excuses for not wanting to be attached to the vine. But the consequence is only darkness. Don't we see that in Paul's life?

Instead of excuses Jesus desires that we remain attached to him. Even when things don't turn the way we want them to be. When things are complicated and difficult Jesus says, remain in me.

Whatever is challenging your patience, your kindness, your gentleness, all through there, Jesus says, remain in me. Because when we don't remain in him, there are no fruits.

Jesus said, "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit..." Now, notice that He said "he will bear much fruit." He didn't say "may bear fruit." But that he, you, we will bear, not just fruit, but much fruit. But for that, we have to remain, we have to abide in Him.

When the world is walking away from God, we must remain in Him, even life is turning hard we must remain in Him, when other "false vines" are luring us, we must remain in the true vine. For remaining in Him He will remain in us as well and make us produce fruits.

We have to stay connected to the vine, it is critical for us to be able to bear much fruit. First things first, we must stay connected to the vine to produce fruits. The contrary is also true, that being disconnected will produce nothing. Remember Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Not only that, but hear what Jesus says: "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." (John 15:6)

Not a good way to be that branch, not a good day to be that branch. Not only there is no fruit but we will be face being thrown away. Is it because of not producing fruits that we will be thrown away? Or, maybe it is because of something else? It is because of our sins. The truth is that when we are disconnected from the true vine, we are capable of anything, anything false that is, anything that goes against God, our sins.

So staying connected is important. But now the question is, how do stay connected?

First, we must remember that it is God who has brought us into connection first. It is him who through our baptism grafted us into Him the true vine. It is not something we have done, or do. But remaining in Him is something we pursue, but not alone, with His help because on our own we will be only looking to get detached from Him. However He invites us to take a proactive attitude in remaining in Him. But how?

There are several ways to stay connected, but those ways are complementary to one another, one of those ways is prayer, cultivating a right attitude of prayer. Worship, corporate worship where God ministers to us through the means of grace, after all it is God's commandment. How about a sunrise breaking over the mountains in the distance is that a way? yes, as long as you praise God and realize his handy work. How about the gift of family? Of course as you give thanks to God for each one of your family members, and most importantly leading them in God's ways.

But, basically we stay connected with what Jesus teaches us here in His word, in the Gospel of John chapter 15, Jesus says: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (John 15:10)

First, we are to keep God's commandments. Not just learning them, or thinking about them, but doing them. Many times we learn them even by memory, but unless we do them, there will be no fruits.

A preacher, Francis Chan, illustrates this point like this: "It's like a parent who asks their kid to go clean their room. Kid leaves and comes back, "Did you clean your room?" "I memorized what you said about cleaning the room." "Well that's great, but did you clean your room?" "I got it tattooed right here on my arm in Hebrew what you said for me to go clean my room, so I could be reminded and everybody know that I should clean my room." "Yeah but did you clean your room?" "I got 4 friends together and we went to a coffee shop and we talked about what you meant when you said clean your room, and we studied the word clean in the Greek and it's Clean-io which means to like clean in haste and clean with much fortitude." Yeah did you clean your room?"

"Oh we went to a conference and we talked about what it meant to clean your room and then somebody told us how to clean more effectively." "Did you clean your room?" God may say, seriously, "Did you clean your room Jack?"

That's what Jesus wants us to do, to obey his commandments and act on them, not that we know and memorize them, but that we do them.

Maybe we have been asked to be in God's word through Bible Study, or reading your Bible faithfully, but we have used excuses for us not to do that, so Jesus says: "Clean your room."

Maybe you are aware that you need to spend more time with your kids and invest in them, before they're gone, but something is happening, yet God is saying, "Clean your room. Invest in these kids that I've given you." Maybe God wants you to be a little selfless and serve others, but fear has overcome you, but God says, "Clean your room, you can do this. Come on." We've got to do what Jesus says. You want to stay connected to this vine, do what Jesus says. He says, "If you keep my commands, you'll abide in my love."

Remember what Jesus says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

This is another important way we keep connected to the vine, that we love each other. But notice what he says: "as I have loved you." Jesus wants us to love in His way not ours. Ours, is more like the disciples who when were they on their way to Jerusalem, they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest, but Jesus instructed them loving in His way, means serving others, that the greatest in God's Kingdom is the one who serves, his love is not based on our materialistic gains, but in his selfless love. He did it for us. He gave his life on the cross of Calvary, even, for our sake, for the forgiveness of our sins, for our salvation. What greater love can there be than that of Jesus who being sinless, took our sins, our lack of fruits, our disobedience of God's commandments upon him and paid for the consequence of those sins. He is love in actions dying on a cross. Selfless love, that's what Jesus desires for us to produce as fruit.

Jesus says "Guys, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you'll bear much fruit, but apart from me, you can do nothing. You want to remain in my love then keep my commands." In other words, "do what I say, love each other as I've loved you."

In fact we can love because he loved us first. On our own we can't produce love. We are incapable, I'm incapable of loving like Jesus loved apart from being connected to him, through His word and the Sacraments. It's not in our nature and we cannot do it, but when we stay connected, all of a sudden fruit starts to happen. Only after Jesus appeared to Paul, only after the scales covering his eyes fell, only then Paul could become an apostle, could love, could give fruits, and more could be comforted in the true way.

Friends, Jesus wants us to remain in him, to abide in him, the true Vine, and when we do, fruits begin to happen and our joy is complete.

May his drawing us near him, through word and sacrament, keep us abiding in him and he in us, for he is the true vine.

In his name, amen.