

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

Has there been any fruit? For all the times we gather in this place and hear God's word, and share in the supper has there been any fruit? Have you been pruned by the word that is proclaimed, trimmed for more vigorous growth? Do you go out through that door strengthened and fed and supplied to bear fruit in the places where you are each week?

From all the committee meetings and Bible Studies and fellowship gatherings has fruit been the result? Are patience and kindness and self-control growing in us and among us? Are the people in your place of work blessed through what you have received here? The people on your street? In your home?

From the hours spent maintaining this church, fixing, mowing, working on newsletters and practicing music and folding bulletins has fruit resulted? Are people brought to Christ who would otherwise be left apart from him? For all the teaching of children and planning of events to encourage parents is there any fruit – greater believing and trusting and hoping in Christ? Has there been any fruit?

Jesus said, "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit." God the Father is not satisfied that we make ourselves busy here – doing over and over what we have done before – entertaining ourselves – having a good time with our friends. Branches that are not bearing fruit the Father will remove. I suppose that might be any of us individually – but even more so I think Jesus is talking about all of us together as the church. Churches with no fruit may keep the doors open and serve themselves but God's Spirit seems to be absent. After a while making us happy, serving our needs, is all that matters.

Jesus said, “Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been pruned by the word that I have spoken to you.”

Has there been fruit? Through his word Jesus prunes us, cuts away what is not productive so that we will bear more. This pruning goes on whenever we hear God’s word and encounter God’s word. Here in this gathering, each day in our homes, when God’s word is read and spoken Jesus is working to create faith and to cut away whatever will keep us from love and faith and caring and holiness.

Jesus said, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Jesus as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”

Being pruned by God’s word is important but even more important is abiding in Christ, Christ abiding in us.

“I am the vine,” said Jesus, “you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

I think of us as a church. Whatever fruit we bear begins with our being connected to Jesus. Everything depends on our being connected to Jesus. Whatever fruit of love and faithfulness and caring is produced in us grows and matures because we are in Christ. Without him we are dead branches, in him blessings beyond our imagining are possible. That is why Lutheran preaching has never centered on the fruit – what you should do – what we intend to accomplish for it is abiding in Christ the vine that causes fruit to grow and mature and ripen.

The danger we face is that we will settle for a cozy “Jesus and me” Christian faith – a “Jesus and us” church. When that happens we are not in Christ – we are just into ourselves. We may be so into ourselves that we never realize that Jesus is sawing off the branch that we are – getting ready to toss us into the fire. Jesus loves the people you encounter all week – the strangers who walk through those doors hoping to find new friends inside. Jesus wants the fruit of reaching out to them and helping them and bringing them in from us. He will supply everything we need to bear this fruit.

Jesus said, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

When we are abiding in Jesus – what we pray for the Father will grant. Pray for words to speak to the friend who is trouble, the Father will provide. Pray for guidance for this congregation in welcoming newcomers, the Father will provide. Pray for those in need, the Father will provide. For when you and I bear fruit in Christ then God is glorified.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have made us branches growing from you. Keep us in your word. Prune us by your word. Keep us abiding in you that we may bear abundant fruit and many will give glory to God because of it. We pray these things trusting in your love and in your mercy. Amen.