**“THAT YOU MAY BEAR FRUIT.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**August 6, 2017, 10:30AM**

**Scripture Texts: John 15:1-11**

Prayer: Father, because what is said and heard here this morning be a demonstration of your Spirit and your power so that our faith will not rest on the words of men but on the wisdom and power of God, for the sake of Jesus. Amen.

**Fruit Season.**

We have spent nine weeks talking about the fruit of the Spirit and how to cultivate this fruit, so we can reap spiritual fruitfulness, which is another way of saying godly Christian character. In Galatians 5 Paul says the evidences of the Holy Spirit in a Christian’s life are nine things.

**Galatians 5:22-23** The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.

We are in the middle of fruit season and fruit harvest here in Whatcom County. We more than most people appreciate fruit and the gift fruit is to us from God.

And we understand fruit takes time. Bearing fruit takes time and something else.

**The Parable of the Little Green Grape.**

Once upon a time there was a little green grape. It was content being a little green grape until one day a little bird perched on a vine nearby and began to insult it:

"What do you think you are?" the bird asked.

"I'm a grape," the little green grape answered.

"No, you're not," the bird disagreed. "You're small and sour and green. Real grapes are large and sweet and red. You're not a real grape."

At this the little green grape became depressed.

A little later the vine-dresser happened to come by. Being a very observant vine-dresser, he noticed that the grape was depressed.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Well," the little green grape began, "I know grapes are supposed to be large and sweet and red, but I'm small and sour and green. I tried to get bigger and sweeter - I even held my breath, which made me a little redder for a little while, but I can't do it. I think I should just give up and drop off onto the ground."

"Don't do that," the vine-dresser said. "Would you like to know the secret to becoming large and sweet and red?"

"Yes!" the little green grape answered.

"Just stay connected to the vine," he answered.

You must be connected to the vine. This is the message of our text this morning.

**John 15:1-11.**

Jesus’ simple parable teaches a few basic truths.

What is the worst thing that could happen in this life? To be cut off from Christ.

What is the best thing that could happen in this life? To be united to Christ.

**The Danger of Fruitlessness and the Source of Fruitfulness, vss. 2-6.**

Unfruitful branches will be cut off and removed. To be cut off from Christ is to die, just as certainly as these cuts flowers will die. To not abide in Christ is a guarantee of fruitlessness.

***The question may be asked how someone grafted into the vine could be fruitless?*** The answer is some who are judged to be in the vine, or profess being in the vine are not truly grafted in. Outward appearances are deceiving. As Jesus said, some call Him Lord but do not know Him or obey Him.

Just as there was an apostle who was not a true apostle, there are believers who are not true believers. There are branches that are not true branches. There is a kind of attachment to Jesus that is not a true attachment. There is no sap, no faith and grace.

We are dry and barren and fruitless apart from being grafted into Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing, meaning nothing truly lasting or eternally significant. Apart from Christ we can do nothing that would be pleasing to God.

Jesus is the source of our life and fruitfulness and fulfilment and joy. By His Spirit in us He is always sanctifying and regenerating and convicting and cleansing.

The Holy Spirit is the life-giving force that makes it possible for us to abide in Christ and to bear fruit. He is the sap that flows from the vine into the branches. When we bear fruit, it is evidence of the Spirit’s presence in us.

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

**The Purpose of Pruning, vs. 2.**

***Why do those already truly grafted in need to be pruned?*** Because we need constant cultivating, there are constant weeds to be dealt with, there is indwelling sin to be killed, there is continued grow in character and maturity necessary. We are all a work in progress until heaven.

Our Father in heaven is personally tending to the branches, personally involved in our lives and our fruitfulness. How does God do this pruning?

**Hebrews 12:6, 10–11** The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” . . . he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it ***yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*** to those who have been trained by it.

God providentially uses circumstances, trials, challenges, setbacks, heartaches to humble us and drive us to prayer and Scripture, to wean us from the world and make us more fruitful. Though painful for a time God means them to produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness and joy.

The Father wants to enliven and intensify our union with Christ. He wants to make it fuller and richer and deeper and more satisfying and more joy producing. He will cut away all that is not like Christ, all the hinders being connected to Him.

It is impossible to be a Christian and not have the seeds of these desires, the conviction that there is more, that we have a long ways to go.

So clearly this fruit bearing is all grace, and to increase in it we must stay connected to the source of grace. He who began a good work, He will continue to do it and complete it.

So, abide in Christ. Your life depends on it, your fruit depends on it, your joy depends on it. Everything your heart truly desires depends on it.

**What does it mean to abide in Christ and how do we do it? Vss. 7-10.**

Abiding is staying connected to the vine.

Abiding is yielding, less of us and more of Him.

Abiding is desiring less of our will and more of His will.

Abiding is detaching more from the world so we can connect more with Christ.

Abiding is saying no to worldly desires and saying yes to walking in the Spirit.

Abiding is being governed more by a longing for God than a longing for our own desires.

Abiding is obeying God’s Law, not out of duty or fear, but as the best path to fruitfulness.

To abide you have to have a dissatisfaction with where we are, a gnawing discontent with the current state of our soul.

***Illustration of berry growers.***

The Tired But Not Retired group was treated last month to a tour of the Jake Maberry processing plant and IQF facility.

One message I got was that in the berry world like most agriculture and business you can’t stay the same, you can’t just be status quo. You will soon be left behind. They are constantly striving for better quality and higher production.

They are constantly experimenting with new plants that grow firmer, more mold resistant berries. They are constantly upgrading equipment and getting more automated. They are striving for the best berries, for more fruitfulness.

There is a parallel to this in the spiritual world. Are we satisfied with were we are spiritually? Are we coasting along and feeling fine about it? If we never grow anymore from where we are right now are we good with that?

Where the Holy Spirit is at work there should be a holy dissatisfaction in our souls, a hunger and thirst for more. There should be a longing to press further up and further in.

**Philippians 3:12-15** Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way.

The Christian life, the sanctification of the Spirit, abiding in Christ, by whatever terms, it is a struggle and the struggle is actually part of the growth and part of the process. Struggling keeps us seeking God and depending on God. The struggle keeps us asking God for help. Fruit grows in the struggle.

So, we pray, “God, I need you. I need your strength. Give me the grace to care about things that really matter, about what you care about, about the fruit of the Spirit. Increase in me a desire for what is truly good.”

If we are satisfied or complacent with where we are, we are dying on the vine.

I tell couples I counsel for marriage that the love they have for each other at the time of their wedding is not enough to make their marriage last. That love will have to change and grow and get deeper. So, it is with our relationship with God. Want more than what you already have.

The beauty of the agricultural metaphors in the Bible is they balance grace and work. Every farmer knows if he doesn’t plow and sow and fertilize he won’t reap. But he also knows that after he has done everything there is so much beyond his control and that it all depends on the grace of God for the seed to sprout, the sun to shine and the rain to fall and the harvest to come.

We have had that lesson in spades this year, too much rain in the spring, not enough in the summer. We are completely dependent on God and not in control.

**I Corinthians 15:10** By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

**Philippians 2:12b-13** Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

***Ask whatever you will and it will be done.*** Really, anything I want? What is the context? The context is in abiding and bearing fruit. Verse 16 makes this even clearer.

**John 15:16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Being connected to the vine is not just passive. Jesus is not passive. Nor should we be passive. Ask, seek, knock. Ask for His joy, ask for His love, ask for His fruit. Pray to be fruit-bearing. For this you were created and saved and for this you are being sanctified. Pray for it.

Do you feel unfruitful, do you feel like the growth or progress is slow, do you feel like your fruit is small? There is ready relief, you have not because you ask not. Our hunger and thirst is meant to drive us to Christ and prayer. God waits to supply all that we lack. If we look to the vine we will never lack His supply for our need. Those who abide in Christ do not pray in vain.

**What is the result of abiding in Christ? Vs. 11.**

***These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.***

What does Jesus desire for us? Jesus wants His joy to be in us so our joy may be full. He is saying, “My desire is that you will enjoy all that I enjoy with the same joy that I enjoy it. That you would have my joy to the full” (John Piper).

His joy is not fleeting or temporary, but lasting. It is not meager or miserly, but generous and full. No sadness will ever be able to trump it.

Do we ever wonder why we have so little fruit, so little joy, peace, patience, self-control? It is because we are too content with too little. C. S. Lewis described our desires as making mud pies in the dirt in the backyard when what is being held out to us is a day at the beach. We are half-hearted, we don’t desire too much, we desire too little (C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory).

We think our joy rests in us and in doing what we want, when there is a fuller and richer and deeper joy offered to us in seeking and knowing and loving and following God. True joy can only be found in the most joyful being in the universe who is the source of all joy.

His love is better than life, His fellowship is better than the best food and drink.

I can promise you and guarantee you that if you cultivate and increase the desire to know and love the most incredible person in the universe, you will experience the fullness of joy and the best pleasures forever more.

**Psalm 16:11** You make known to me the path of life; in your presence, there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Where in your life do you need the most growth, where are you most dissatisfied? Would you be willing to ask God to give you a new fullness of His Holy Spirit to enable you to grow in that area? Are you ready to deny yourself, to yield control of your life to God and to live according to His Word?

The need of every person in this room, and of every church including ours, is to come under greater influence and experience greater power and more faith, to be more connected to the vine.

John Stott was a famous pastor and writer from England and a fruitful follower of Christ. Every morning as he woke up he prayed a simple prayer:

“Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

How do you abide in Christ, how do we grow the fruit of the Spirit, when that fruit seems to be small and sour and green, how do we experience the fullness of joy? Pray for it and stay connected to the vine.

**Prayer:**

What do you want to ask the Holy Spirit to do in you and for you? What do you want concerning fruit? What good desires do you want the Spirit to stir up?

Take a few moments to ask the Spirit to do a new and fresh work in your heart. Ask for an increase in the fruit in your life.

Holy Father, in this summer season of fruitfulness in our county, may it also be a season of fruitfulness in our hearts and in our church. Saturate our souls with the Spirit of Christ and enlarge our capacity to receive the full measure of your Spirit and your love. Give us the fullness of Christ that overflows in great love for you and in great love for each other and in great fruitfulness for your glory.