

JJ¹

It's hard to believe that just two weeks ago today, we were still in the middle of a record setting blizzard. I must admit, I didn't think that two weeks later there would be just the smallest remnants left of all that snow! As the snow piled up, all I could think was, "We're not going to see the grass until May!" But, the snow is gone and there's even some green grass popping. Though a year ago at this time we were already cutting the grass and the trees were filling with leaves, the fruits of spring are bursting forth.

As spring goes along, you're going to find patches of grass, branches of trees, or even whole plants that didn't survive the winter. You're going to dig up and reseed that patch of lawn. You're going to trim those branches. You're going to dig up those dead plants to make room for new ones. It's basic botany.

Today, Jesus uses a lesson from basic botany to talk about our relationship with him and our lives as Christians. Living in such an agricultural area should impress on our hearts all the more that as children of God, **WE'RE IN THE FRUIT BUSINESS.**

Jesus spoke these words in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday night, as he celebrated the Passover one last time with his disciples. In these words we

have one of Jesus' great "I AM" statements of John's Gospel. It's one of ten times Jesus uses this unique phrase. What makes this phrase so unique and important is that when any Jew heard this phrase in their language, they would have immediately recognized it as a reference to the greatest name that God uses to describe himself to us—the LORD.

It's the name we see as we read the Old Testament which has all the letters of the name "LORD" capitalized. It is the name God used to describe himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai as their loving covenant God—the God of gospel promises.

As the LORD, the great I AM, Jesus says that he "is the true Vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he is going to cut off. And he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

By his grace, God has brought you into the Vine—he has connected you to your Savior, Jesus. He did this at your baptism through the power of his Word connected with water. He made you clean and holy in his sight for the sake of his Son by forgiving all your sins. But God didn't do this so that you would go off and live a fruitless life. No, as Jesus says, his purpose of connecting you to him, the

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Vine, is so that you “bear much fruit.”
WE’RE IN THE FRUIT BUSINESS.

Although God has made you clean in his sight, there is still a diseased part of you that tries to keep you from getting any nourishment from the Vine and producing good fruit. This diseased part of you is your sinful nature. Because of this, one way or another, cutting and chopping is necessary in your life.

While Jesus uses this image of a vine and its branches to picture you and your relationship with him, it is important for you to keep in mind this one big difference: the branches of a vine don’t choose to be bad and die. Something happens to them—bugs, disease, damage, etc. While things in this world and the devil work to harm you, your production of bad fruit is *your choice*. You choose to sin—you choose to harbor hatred—you choose to slander someone—you choose to be lazy—you choose the pillow over church—you choose the ways of the world regarding marriage (or the lack thereof)—you choose to cheat—you choose TV over devotions, etc.

Every evil you gather in your mind, fill your eyes with, pour out from your mouth and perform with your hands is your choice. When you make rotten fruit,

you’ve chosen to do so. And if you cannot handle whatever it is that you’re using to serve your sinful desires instead of making good fruit, God will cut off.

He may cut off / take away your driver’s license—allowance—toys—freedom—your respect—job—abilities—strength, etc. All those things you love too much and use to serve yourself, use to produce nothing of worth or value in God’s eyes, God wants to prune from your heart and

life. Yes, he may even do it with things that are good! But if you’re using them in a way God didn’t intend for them to be used or using them to keep yourself away from him and his Word, he will prune those things! Why? Because he loves you!!!

Friends, **WE’RE IN THE FRUIT BUSINESS.** If you refuse to be fruitful, then God will cut you off from the Vine. He will cut you off because you’ve

already made yourself a dead and worthless branch on the Vine by clinging to sin instead of producing fruits of faith. You will be cut off, gathered up and thrown into the eternal fires of hell!

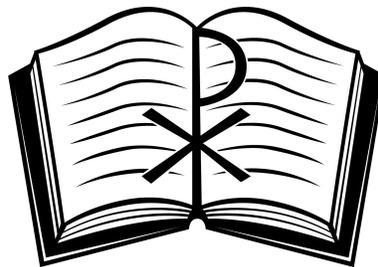
That’s why, in love, the Father prunes you by cutting back your unproductive sinful nature. It’s never pleasant, and can even be painful, but the goal is that you



would remain in the Vine and produce much fruit.

This is why Jesus says, “Remain in me, and I am going to remain in you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

You need to stay connected to Christ, the Vine, so that you can be who God has made you to be and bear much fruit. Your growth and pruning only began at your baptism and it’s not going to be complete until you get to heaven. Just think how many grapes would be on a branch of a grapevine if a new branch decided to stop growing as soon as it first sprouted from the vine? It would be worthless! It wouldn’t be living up to its potential. The same is true with you. Your baptism isn’t simply a ticket you keep in your back pocket and take out and hand to God at the end of your life to get into heaven. Your baptism sets you apart from this sinful world and sets you free so that you can produce much fruit. And the only way you can produce that fruit is to remain in the Vine, in Christ. And the only way to remain in Christ is to continue to be in his Word.



Every day you need to be nourished by the Vine. The disease of sin and the lies of Satan are strong. You aren’t strong enough to stay alive on your own, let alone produce fruits of faith. You need to be in Christ and in his Word because it’s the only thing stronger than your sin and Satan. You need to be in the Word so that the Father can keep pruning you to keep you safe and bring you safely home to heaven. You also need to be connected to Christ to produce the fruit God has planned for you to produce. And he has prepared all kinds of fruit for you to produce.

Fruit like the fruit of Philip, who eagerly told the Ethiopian Eunuch the Word of God. Fruit like the fruit of the Eunuch, who eagerly desired to learn more of God’s Word. Fruit like the fruit John described in our second

lesson—the fruit of loving others not just in your words, but also with what you do.

Today in our text, Jesus especially addresses the fruit of prayer. He says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Friends, when you see fruits lacking in your life, Christ invites you to come to him in prayer and ask for the strength to produce more and more fruit. And guess what? The answer to that prayer is always “YES!”

Friends, as children of God, **WE'RE IN THE FRUIT BUSINESS**. Remain in the Vine, remain in Christ by continuing to be a student of his Word. Daily let your hearts be cut with the law so that you'd see you deserve to be cut off from Christ. Daily let your hearts be healed and nourished with the sap of the gospel so that you'd turn from your sin in repentance and gladly produce beautiful fruit. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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