

FIFTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

John 15:1-11

Have you ever heard that saying, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” Sometimes it is used as a pessimistic remark about favoritism in high places. But when applied to spiritual matters it has a totally different meaning. We could never know enough to pass any theology test devised by God. So all He requires is that we know His Son, Jesus Christ. Getting into heaven is not about what you know, but who you know. It’s all about what we might call the Jesus Connection.

In a sense that is what the parable of the vine tells us. But it goes beyond that. It not only says that we must have a relationship with Jesus Christ, it describes what kind of relationship. It tells us our place and role, as well as God's place and role. It also tells us how Jesus fits into it all

Jesus’ story about the vine and the branches is a story with a three part message to it for us. First there is God who is the farmer, the caretaker, of the vine. Then there is Jesus who is the main part of the vine. And finally there are the branches, which are the followers of Jesus, and that includes us.

But what does it all mean? First let's consider God: the vine grower. The role of the vine grower is to care for the vine so that it is able to produce fruit. Jesus says that every branch that bears no fruit He removes. Such branches simply sap energy from the branches that are producing fruit, so God removes them and throws them in the trash heap. There were a lot of fruitless branches on God’s vine in Jesus’ day. The Sadducees and the

Pharisees were not serving God, and they were among the ones that God would cut off.

So if God cuts off the fruitless branches, He must pamper the fruitful ones, right? Wrong! Jesus says that God “prunes” the fruitful branches. What’s the difference between pruning and removing. Apparently to care for a grape vine, one has to prune it. If the branches are not pruned they produce little or no fruit. However if they are properly pruned they produce much fruit.

In the next verse Jesus says that we have already been “cleansed” by the word He has spoken to us. So through Jesus’ teachings we are being pruned so we can bear fruit.

Has anyone here ever read the Bible, or heard a sermon and felt a twinge of guilt from it. Maybe it spoke to our heart about some way that we were not serving God as we should. When that happens to some people they think, “Well I must not have been a very good Christian, or I wouldn’t be feeling convicted of that sin or lack of faith.” On the contrary, if we were unfruitful we would not feel that twinge. We would have been cut off from God, and our heart would have been hardened to the Spirit convicting us. But because we feel that twinge, God is pruning us to make us more fruitful. The fact that the Spirit is working on our heart, proves that we must be producing fruit for God. It also shows that God foresees us producing more fruit!

It is like a parent who places demands on a child. The parent makes the child study and do their homework. The parent makes the child take responsibilities. Many times the child doesn’t like it, but it is done in love. If the parent cared less, they would not train, or discipline, the child at all. In the same way God loves us, and sometimes that love includes telling us we are wrong, or allowing circumstances to change our lives. God does not want to hurt us. God simply wants to cleanse us of those

things that are keeping us from producing more fruit.

That is God's role in caring for the vine, but what about the vine and its branches. Jesus said, "I am the true vine." The purpose of the vine is to carry water and nutrients to the branches.

Without those nutrients the branches would die. They need what the vine supplies, to live, to grow and to make fruit.

Jesus also said "you are the branches. Abide in me and I 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." Without the water of life and the spiritual nourishment that Jesus provides, we would die. We need Jesus, the vine, to provide those things.

That is the Jesus connection.

What do we need those things for? To bear much fruit! What does this fruit look like? Some people think Jesus is speaking only of leading people to Christ. That is part of it but there is much more. The Old Testament uses the image of Israel as a vine that God transplanted and built a vineyard for. It was supposed to produce justice and righteousness. God's purpose for Israel was to be an example of holiness to the nations. The New Testament speaks of the fruit of the Spirit being: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." These are the things that our lives should produce as a result of being in Christ.

So living the Christian life is all about the Jesus Connection. We must ask ourselves if we are connected? Do we have an uplink to God? That is a serious question! Without it we're dead.

Jesus' little parable here says that without it we will be cut off. If we answer, "yes, I am connected," then where is our fruit?

Do we find the fruits of the Spirit in our life? Do we display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in our lives? If not, we will be

pruned.

If we are truly honest with ourselves we would probably all say “yes and no.” Sometimes there are parts of our lives that are dead wood. Places in our hearts that are not producing these fruits. God needs to prune those. Yes it will hurt, but it will enable us to bear more fruit.

Jesus said He is the vine and we are the branches. And He came that we may be filled with the joy of the spirit. Seek to abide in Him, that He may abide in us and give us joy, both as a church and as individuals.

AMEN.