

THE CALL TO PRODUCE FRUIT

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Easter, 2018

John 15:1-8

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, John 15:1-8: ¹ **“I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Gardener. ² He takes out every branch in Me that does not bear fruit and prunes every branch that bears fruit, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I shall remain in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the Vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like the branch and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burnt. ⁷ If you remain in Me, and My Words remain in you, ask for what-ever you wish! It will be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus had just given His disciples a lecture on fruit-bearing, showing them both what He expected of them, and how they might live up to that expectation. Jesus was not showing them how to become saved Christians, but how to *remain* saved Christians. We see this by the words of Jesus when He says, **“You are already clean.”**

We already know that we are saved alone by grace through faith, for Christ’s sake without the deeds of the Law, and that we are saved to bear fruit to the glory of God, but it is by its fruitfulness that saving faith reveals itself.

The leading thought in our lesson is fruit. We have been made members of Christ for the purpose of bearing fruit for God. **“By this My Father is glorified,”** says Christ, **“that you bear much fruit, and become My disciples.”** This is the general teaching of the Bible. The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians that *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,”* (Eph. 2:10). Our Lord teaches the same thing under the parable

of the barren fig tree, which was cultivated and fertilised to make it productive, but which disappointed by its persistent barrenness.¹ Should it continue to be barren it was to be cut down and burned. Christ is here expressing the divine disappointment and wrath over the persistent unfruitfulness of the Jewish Church and makes this a warning for the Christian Church.

We plant a vine for the sake of the fruit we expect from it, so if it should fail to produce fruit, it is worthless to us and is dealt with accordingly. God planted the vine of His Church for the sake of the fruit: if members do not produce that fruit they are worthless to Him. All too often professing Christians forget the fruit-bearing part of Christianity, simply being content with the knowledge that they are baptised and confirmed church members. With this kind of attitude, how can any of us expect to see the church to grow, preferring to put our light under a basket, rather than letting it shine as a light before others?²

A vine is planted to produce a particular kind of fruit. God planted this vine to produce a particular kind of fruit. The fruit expected is the fruit of the Spirit, defined by St. Paul as “...love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... and they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts,” (Gal. 5:22-23). Christianity is not merely meeting on a Sunday for worship, and then going home only to meet again a week later. No, Christianity is a practical way or quality of life, of faith which exercises itself in good works every single day.

God has every right to expect fruit from His Christians. For that purpose, He sent His Son into the world. Christ lived and died for us. Why? So that the sinner might continue as he was? No, Christ died to deliver us from the power of sin, to turn us from sinful living and be conformed to His image of holiness, and to live before Him in righteousness and purity as children of God. He died so that we would be fruitful in holiness to the glory of God. Surely, we are not so insensible of the great love that prompted the sacrifice of Christ that we could show ourselves indifferent with regard to the desired fruit of that sacrifice of love - namely, a pure, holy, Christ-surrendered life. It is not a question of being absolutely perfect in fruit production - no Christian living in the flesh can be that - but of producing fruit acceptable to God. What is bad

¹ Luke 13:6-9

² Matthew 5:15-16

is covered by the blood of Christ, and what is lacking in quality and quantity is made good by His merit.

Secondly, we should observe that it is not *immaterial* whether we produce the expected fruit or not.

Jesus said, “**He takes out every branch in Me that does not bear fruit.**” “**If anyone does not remain in Me,**” and is therefore unfruitful, “**he is thrown away like the branch and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burnt.**” Christ’s meaning is plain. Christians who do not show fruit in their life are not in the body of Christ. They are cut out, withered, and burnt in the eternal fire.

God does what every fruit grower does - He cuts out the unfruitful wood and burns it. The unfruitful branch may long continue as a member of a Christian congregation. Congregations are not told that they must judge as to who of their members might be unfruitful branches and to exclude them. No, the weeds and the wheat grow together until the day of harvest.³ In our fields weeds never turn into wheat, but in the congregation an unfruitful branch may become a very fruitful one. At the end of time it will become manifest who were the true and who were only dead branches. God has no place in heaven for the unfruitful. If we resist the work of the Holy Spirit in making us fruitful branches, if we allow the love of Christ to grow cold in us, if we become apathetic and careless with regard to the fruit of holiness in our lives and are satisfied with a merely formal Christianity or “churchianity,” then in that day we shall be found fit only for the burning.

² **He takes out every branch in Me that does not bear fruit and prunes every branch that bears fruit, that it may bear more fruit.** This pruning is done through the various sorrows, sufferings, trials and afflictions that Christians are subjected to in this life. In the counsel of God these all have the ultimate purpose of producing more and better spiritual fruit. Judged from the standpoint of our ease-loving flesh they are evils. But, judged by their spiritual effect and purpose, they are a great blessing. A vine that has been let run wild into a profusion of tangled branches and leaves, produces little and poor fruit. An expert gardener takes it over and prunes it heavily. When he is finished, it looks scarred and marred, so much so that the average person would say, it is completely ruined. But eventually it will be a better and more fruitful vine because of its severe treatment. Even so the children of God are at times marred and scarred by the heavenly Father’s pruning. Think of Job. But he will be the better

³ Matthew 13:24-30

and more fruitful for it. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls attention to this very fact when he writes, “*No discipline at the time seems pleasant, but painful. Yet, later on, discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it,*” (12:11).

Another kind of pruning is done when God in His Word rebukes fleshly, worldly and selfish habits, traits, and affections which hinder the production of the desired fruit - and there are many such to be found among professing Christians. Many strongly object to being rebuked for this or that bad habit or practice which though pleasant to the flesh hinders fruitfulness. We hear them say, “*There is nothing wrong in what we are doing; why should we continually be admonished to give it up?*” Here let it be said that every faithful pastor seeing that bad habits and practices are hindering fruit production, must warn, plead, and exhort, with a view to cleansing the branch and encouraging a greater fruitfulness in the Christian life. A true Christian will never object to that which leads to more and better spiritual fruit production. Usually it will be found that it is the non-producing branches that are loudest in their objections to such exhortations.

Finally let us observe that it is only by virtue of our union with Christ that we become useful fruit-bearing branches of Christ’s Church.

Again, Jesus says, “**³ You are already clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I shall remain in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the Vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing.**” We cannot help noticing how strongly Christ emphasises the need to abide in Him.

Every true member of Christ has been cleansed from the guilt and love of sin through faith in Christ. He has been freely justified by His blood and sanctified through the Spirit. He has become a new creature filled with the Spirit of Christ and united to Him. By virtue of that cleansing and union he has become a productive branch. A branch severed from the vine cannot go on living and producing fruit. So it is with the Christian. It is only through a continuing union with Christ that he can go on living and producing the desired fruit. Our Lord makes that plain enough. The life-giving sap must flow from Him to the branches. Any stoppage in that flow must lead to un-productiveness.

We become united to Christ by a living faith in Him. *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ* (Rom. 10:17), and so faith is kept by the Word of God. If you would be kept in the faith hear and read what God has to tell you in His Word and hear especially the words of the Lord at His Table when He says, *“This is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.”* He who abides in Christ is regular in his attendance at worship and at the Lord’s Supper, he is instant in prayer and he practises fellowship with his fellow brethren. When a Christian begins to love the world and the things that are in the world, when he seeks the friendship of the world in preference to that of fellow-Christians, when he becomes sluggish in prayer, there is a great danger that he is a withering branch.

The reason for so much unfruitfulness and poor productiveness among present day Christians is that they do not live in close union with Christ through the Word. **“Without Me you can do nothing.”** It will not do to blame Christ for a barren life, saying, *“I cannot do anything without Christ. If He does not make me a good fruit-bearer, how can I help it?”* The real fault is that individuals will not be united with Christ through the medium of His Word and thereby hinder the life-sap from Him flowing into their lives.

Many, for example, do not believe the essential doctrines about Christ and His atonement. Misbelief on this point severs from Christ. Such may appear to produce fruit, but it is only sour grapes, worthless and not what God expects. It is not from Christ.

Dear friends, do we wish to produce the fruit of the Spirit for which purpose we have been made Christians by God? That is the important question. Surely our sense of what is right and desirable has not become so dulled that we are indifferent to fruit bearing. Our gratitude to Christ for laying down His life for us has not become so stunted, that we are quite careless about glorifying the Father by bringing forth in our lives those very fruits, to produce which Christ died. Do we wish to be happy, contented, and satisfied? Do we wish to enjoy eternal life with Christ in glory? That wish is tied up with the fruits of the Spirit. We will bear them in abundance by abiding in Christ and letting Christ abide in us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ An angel of the Lord told Philip, “Get up and go southwards on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza!”

This is desert. ²⁷ He got up and went. A man from Ethiopia was there, a eunuch, who was a high official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go up to this chariot and stay close to it!”

³⁰ Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ He answered, “How could I, unless someone guided me?”

He invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The passage of the Scripture that the man was reading was this: “He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered and, as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so He did not open His mouth. ³³ In His humiliation, His justice was taken away. Who will describe His descendants? For His life has been taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch answered Philip, “I ask you, about whom is the prophet saying this, about himself or someone else?”

³⁵ Then Philip began to speak. He began from this passage of Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were travelling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look! Here is water. What is there to prevent me from being baptised?”

³⁸ He ordered the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptised him. ³⁹ When they had come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ However, Philip was found at Ashdod. As he passed through all the cities, he kept telling the Good News, until he came to Caesarea.

1 John 4:1-11

¹ Dearly loved people, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God! For many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. ³ However, any spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and which is already now in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have over-come

them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world. That is why they speak from the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not from God does not listen to us. In this way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷ Dearly loved people, let us love one another! For love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been given birth by God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love has not known God, because God is Love. ⁹ This is how God has shown His love among us: He has sent His only Son into the world that we may live through Him. ¹⁰ This is what love is: not that we have loved God but that He has loved us and has sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dearly loved people, since that is how God has loved us, we also ought to love one another.

John 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Gardener. ² He takes out every branch in Me that does not bear fruit and prunes every branch that bears fruit, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I shall re-main in you. As the

branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the Vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like the branch and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burnt. ⁷ If you remain in Me, and My Words remain in you, ask for whatever you wish! It will be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples.