

5th Sunday of Easter.
John 15:1-8
Hymns: 164, 465, 181, 170, 288, 642.

Introit: Psalm 150.

P Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary;

C praise him in His mighty heavens!

P Praise Him for His mighty deeds;

C praise Him according to His excellent greatness!

P Praise Him with trumpet sound;

C praise Him with lute and harp!

P Praise Him with tambourine and dance;

C praise Him with strings and pipe!

P Praise Him with sounding cymbals;

C praise Him with loud clashing cymbals!

All Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Collect: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

1st Reading: Acts 8:26-40.

Epistle: 1 John 4:1-21.

Gospel: 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 the sermon is the Gospel heard before, John 15:1-8.

[1] “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch of Mine that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, He it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. [6] If anyone does not abide in Me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. [7] If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.

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

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

[1] “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch of Mine that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. To be uprooted and discarded...or, to be cut with pruning shears; I suppose, from the vine’s perspective, neither option would seem to be a good one. Both the shovel and the pruning shear, after-all, inflict a wound. The shovel kills the vine. The pruning shear kills the dead wood so the vine can produce fruit at the proper time.

The fruit of the vine is harvested in the mid to late summer. The clusters are handled carefully so that the fruit isn’t crushed, or, even bruised. The symmetry and fullness of a cluster of grapes is a work of art, God’s

art, **"You open Your hand, and You satisfy the desire of every living thing."** [Psalm 145:16,] Indeed, looking at the beauty of God's creation, we are moved to confess with the Psalmist, **"there is none like You among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like Yours. For you are great and do wondrous things."** [Psalm 86,]

God causes fruit to grow on the vine. He has ordained, however, to bring about the summer harvest through a process that takes place in the dead of winter. At that particular time of the year, the vines look as if they should be cut down and burned. They have no leaves and no fruit on them. They're gnarled and tangled. If there is any beauty in them, any redeeming quality, it is only in the eyes of God and, perhaps in the discerning and hopeful eye of the wine maker.

On a cold winter's day, pruners trample through the vineyard and they treat the vines rather savagely. Everything to within a few feet of the main trunk is cut and ripped away. Piles are made of the cut branches. The piles are gathered up and put into bigger piles in order to be burned. If vines could cry out, wouldn't they not cry then!?

You and I have all experienced what the vine experiences, although on a deeper and more profound level. God created us and then when we became gnarled and tangled in sin, He recreated us in Christ that we might bear fruit. He grafted us into His Son that connected to Him, we might be God's work of art, a vine that produces fruit that serves and gladdens the heart of His creation while giving glory and honour to Him.

There are two settled principles to be harvested from Jesus' words here in John 15 regarding the vine and the branch and the fruitfulness of them. First, if the branch is cut off from the vine it can do nothing. And second, unless the branch is pruned it cannot produce fruit.

The first point seems pretty self-evident. If you cut a branch off from a vine the branch is going to die. In fact, as to its relationship or its connection to the vine, it is already dead once it's been cut off. Oh, it can be re-rooted and replanted, but, in that state it will no longer be a part of the vine that bore it. So, if it produces fruit it will be the fruit of its own making. The fruit may appear to the world to be startling and glorious, but, it is rejected by God because it isn't the fruit of the true vine.

Jesus says, **"apart from Me you can do nothing, or cut off from Me you can do nothing."** Without faith, without being grafted into the vine, it's impossible to please God. The point of this analogy is that everything in our lives, apart from sin, of course, is considered good by God, full of fruit that supports and loves our neighbour and gives glory to God, because He makes our lives good. Our faith is in Christ and Him crucified. So, we get up in the morning to go off to work and God says, "It is good, well done!" We change our baby's nappy and because that's what God has given us to do, He says, "It is good, well done!" We hold our grandchildren or great grandchildren in our arms and God says, "It is good, well done!"

The point is, we can't make anything in our life's good. Remember, you're the branch, not the vine. But, because you are grafted into the vine, into Christ, it is all good!

As we look out over the vineyard in June/July, you see the gnarled and tangled vines, void of leaves and fruit. They're beautiful only to God and to the discerning and hopeful eye of the wine maker but they look ugly to us. They're still connected to the vine, but, they won't produce fruit in the summer unless they are pruned. And so, the savage ritual begins.

God puts the shears to us, cutting away what is gnarled and tangled, so that we will produce fruit to our neighbours good and to His glory. This is the second of the principles harvested from this text in John 15. Unless the branch is pruned it will not bear fruit.

What we often think of as God turning His back on us, of Him abandoning us, is actually His pruning us so that we might bear more fruit. Again, it's sometimes a painful process, but, quite necessary, nonetheless. If the vines could cry out, would they not cry out then!?

11 Do not reject the discipline of the LORD, my son, or feel disgusted when He reprimands you! 12 For the LORD disciplines the one whom He loves, and, like a father, He disciplines the son in whom he delights. [Proverbs 3:11.]

If God didn't love us He wouldn't be active in our life. If He didn't love us He wouldn't take the time to prune and nurture us. If He didn't love us, He'd cut us off and discard us. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes this very passage from Proverbs and then he concludes his comments regarding God's discipline, saying, "**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.**"[Hebrews 12:5.]

Having come to see God's tender hand in adversity and trial, we make the simple confession that "we don't always understand His way but we do want to be part of it." We cling to His word because He makes us sure and certain promises in it. He assures us that "nothing will ever be able to separate us from His love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And then we kneel before the altar to be grafted again into the vine. The fruit of the vine is laid upon our sin parched lips. Christ's broken body is given to us. We are united with God, one with Him in purity and righteousness. Buds of fruit blossom in our lives, beginning with the simple confession that Jesus did this, gave His body and blood, for us! For me!

As is true of several of you, I've harvested grapes and I've pruned the vines too. The two activities couldn't be more strikingly dissimilar. The harvest is filled with joy because the vines have fulfilled their intended purpose. They provide the fruit to lighten the hearts of men and to give glory to God. They suffered, however, the pruner's shears earlier. If they could have wept, they would have wept! "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning." "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit We would like Him to take away, and every branch that does bear fruit We would like Him to prune, that We may bear more fruit." In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

3rd Hymn: 181,

Prayer of the Church for the 5th Sunday of Easter.

P Let us pray to our gracious Father on behalf of ourselves, for the whole household of the faithful and for all people as they have need.

Brief silence

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and bring forth the fruits of Your love within us, that we who have known Your gracious favour may show forth Your love to one another. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and live together within the power of Your love, forgiving one another as You have forgiven us, welcoming the stranger as You have welcomed us and proclaiming Your mercy to those not yet of Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and bear the good fruit of Your kingdom in our daily lives, that we may do the good works of Him who has called us out of darkness into Your marvellous light. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and offer to Your glory the artistry of our minds, hands and voices for the display of Your glory. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and not be overcome by the fears and terrors of this world. Give to all our leaders wisdom, integrity of heart, a desire for true justice and a love of peace. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and care for those in need, the hungry, the wounded in body and spirit, the grieving and those in the hour of death [*especially:*]. May those who call upon You in their need know the fullness of Your healing grace in the day of their trouble. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and bless all Your servants, especially our pastors, teachers, catechetical students and church workers who serve us in Your name and at Your own bidding. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and not fear to worship You in the beauty of holiness, with the works of our hands and with the resources You have entrusted to our care; receive now these tithes and offerings as tokens of our faith and signs of our trust. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You, that we may receive for our blessing Christ's Holy body and precious blood in this Sacrament and be kept blameless and holy to the day of His coming. Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Abide in us, O Lord, that we may abide in You and deliver to You the petitions of our hearts without fear and with full confidence of Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 170,