

Our focal scripture this morning is John 15:1-8

Hear the words of God:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>(a)</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

May the Lord add a blessing to the reading, the hearing, the interpretation and the doing of His word..

The Lord paints a wonderful image of the vineyard.

In a vineyard, the best grapes are produced closest to the main vine. I am told that the workers that work in vineyards that produce fruit for wine are very selective to pick the best fruit based on their location to be used in wine pressing necessary to make a desirable bottle of wine.

The best fruit I'm told is closest to the central vine. This is where the nutrients are most present and in the greatest quantities.

The fruit that is closest to the vine is usually the sweetest, and most often the plumpest and most satisfying.

Being close to the central vine, the root, the fruit produced receive the best of everything the root has to offer.

In fact, this is why growers of grapes are so diligent about pruning their vines... because the farther away from the vine the grapes are, the bitterer and the smaller they will be.

There is limited use for bitter fruit.

But close in, close to the heart of the vine, abiding near the heart, they find the nourishment they need and produce bountifully.

And just as the winemaker is careful to prune and tend and nurish the fruit to produce the best that harvest has to offer, Jesus says that he garden that produces disciples is the same.

Jesus tells us this morning that “He is the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.”

We too need to be fed and nourished in our work. As Jesus reminds us in the gospel of John:

“A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me... without me, you can’t do anything.”

The gardener we are told, to produce this magnificent harvest, must not only nurture and care, but He must prune

But let's face it, pruning sounds harsh to our ears.

Pruning involves cutting away.

It is a surgical strike designed to get so much more from the vine.

Every good Christian, every disciple of Christ knows that there are things in our lives that God will need for us to cut away.

Things and people that are necessary to be removed because they simply hinder our growth in God and keep us from developing and living into the lives of abundant blessing that God intends for us.

While the pruning is done by the loving, careful and skilled gardener, the abiding is something that we do. We make a choice to abide in Jesus.

So what does it mean to abide in and to remain in Jesus?

All of us should be reading the bible... it is the number one way that we stay connected with Jesus. Biblical study is so much easier when you are in a safe space where you can ask questions and participate in stimulating conversation.

As we begin to move out of our pandemic restrictions, we are all hungry and thirsting for time together in the safe place we call Mt Paran to do just that.

Bible study itself is something that this church really needs in order for us to grow spiritually.

It is where the truths of God are revealed and we in turn are changed by understanding the Word of God.

In our scripture of 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16 “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them”

Love is at the heart and the essence of God and so too at the heart and the essence of the Christian experience.

Life without God offers cheap substitutions for the true love.

Love is that universal hunger in the human heart, and John knows this.

John tells us that if we love one another in a Godly way, God lives in us and His love is perfected in us. That none has ever seen God, but if we love one another we can see the reflection of God's love. (1 John 4:12)

Love is filled with true companionship and relationship and impacts how we see and relate to God and others.

As we grow spiritually, rooted in God's word, God's love becomes alive in us as His word is made manifest in our lives.

How people experience us and how we experience others changes as we allow God's word to grow deeper within us.



In Pastor Donna's children's sermon she compared the full grape to the shriveled up raisin that had been further away from the center of the vine.

Sometimes we can feel like that raisin, aching for the connection to our creator God, and just feeling out of sorts because something is missing.

Sure the shriveled and dried fruit is good for somethings, but fruit when it is at it's peak is so much more desirable.

And what is this fruit that the Lord wants us to bear?

The word tells us in Galatians 5:22-23 that the fruit of the Spirit is indeed desirable. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

If you are lacking in any of those expressions of the Spirit in your life, ask yourself am I really abiding in God?

Last Sunday we began looking at the “I am” statements of Christ. Last Sunday we examined Christ as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

In this week He says that he is the vine.

If we are to be connected to a life filled with love, peace, joy, faithfulness, goodness and the rest, we can only get that by being connected to Jesus.

And we find in our Acts scripture we see a Holy Spirit working in concert to bring each person to the God who loves and carefully cares for them.

The Spirit knew that the Ethiopian had questions and a desire for the living word.

The Spirit was so intent on dispensing the knowledge that the Ethiopian lacked about God, despite his high standing.

In the end, no matter how much the Eunuch, the high court official of the queen of the Ethiopians knew, it paled in comparison to the knowledge about the study of God's word.

God is so concerned about this learned and well positioned high court official getting an understanding of the scripture that he prepared and sent one who could rightly divide the word for Him.

Notice the texts elaborate description of the Old Testament that Philip was being asked to interpret "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

These two men sat down and discussed the scripture that tells of the greatest loving sacrifice ever made of our Jesus for the sins of all.

The Acts 8 scripture ends with the eunuch being changed enough to want to receive baptism and belonging into the family of God.

That's what happens when we abide in Christ, the True Vine. When we abide by studying the word of God, we are changed by the very Word of God.

Two men discussing until understanding was reached.

That's the beauty of Bible study. That's the beauty of spending time in the scripture.

God's love for us and for all humanity is revealed and we are changed.

The entire Bible is one long love story of our God towards you and me.

To not open our Bible and discover it's words, it's meaning for our lives, is like having the greatest gift imaginable and just letting it sit in the corner and collect dust.

Our world and our church in particular is preparing to exit from the pandemic and to enter back into a way of gathering.

I am anticipating that we will be able to return to gathering in the next few weeks, perhaps for outdoor worship.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thank offering to God to see new full Bible Study classes emerge?

Imagine our congregation gathering for outdoor worship and in every pocket of our yard to see separate Bible discussions going on?

Imagine how strong our church will become when we are all seeking to just do what Philip and the Ethiopian official did. They just simply sat on the grass and talked about the things of God.

Scripture says where two or three are gathered God, the great I am, is in the midst. There was the two of them and the Holy Spirit present in that conversation proclaiming the good news of Jesus, and transformation happened.

As we emerge from the pandemic into a new way of gathering this summer I invite you to pray and prepare your hearts to ask God about stepping up your “abiding” by attending a Bible Discussion class here to learn of the God who loves you deeper than anyone ever could.

The Word said it clearly. If we abide in Him and He abides in us we shall bear much fruit.



We cannot get to the deepening and abiding love of God without getting deeper into the word.

Beloved of God, Amen.