

5th Sunday of Easter
“Much fruit or nothing!” John 15:5
April 28, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 5th Sunday of Easter is from our Gospel reading, John 15:5.

“5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

So far the text...

Pronouns...pronouns. He, she, they, them, it...Some people these days have become infatuated with their pronouns...how they are to be referred to and how a person is to be called. Well, pronouns are very important to Jesus and He emphasizes two of them over and over in our Gospel reading. “I and you.”

Jesus is the “I” and the Christian, the believer in Jesus is the “you”. That’s the Christian religion in a nutshell. The “I” stands alone. And the “you” can’t stand alone but needs to be connected to the “I”. Jesus is the great “I am”. He alone is the Source of all life, the Creator of all life, the Giver of all life, the Fountain of all life. As we heard last week, Jesus said “I am the Good Shepherd”. He is Good in Himself and gives His goodness and holiness to the sheep who are not good and holy. As the source of all life, Jesus laid down His life for the sheep and by His power took it up again when He rose from the dead.

In order for the sheep to be brought into the sheepfold there needs to be a connection to the great “I am”. They need to hear His voice and through the Word that the sheep hear, life is given. For Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.” (John 14:6) Jesus said this in the previous chapter.

And now He gives us a most beautiful illustration of how a person can come and only come to the Father by being connected to Jesus, the Vine. “I am the Vine and you are the branches.” “I...you, I...you”.

This most personal connection with Jesus through faith is emphasized over and over again in our Gospel. This personal relationship with Jesus begins with the “I”, that is, the “I am”. It doesn’t begin with me. The Christian, the believer in Jesus, is connected, is united with the source of all life. The connection is so easily and visually shown that even a child can grasp his or her relationship to Jesus the Savior.

A branch can't have life in it if it is broken off from the tree. And, of course, it can't bear any fruit on its own if it is laying there on the ground, not connected to the tree. It will wither and dry up.

“4 Abide in Me, and I in you.” Jesus gives the invitation and command to every man, woman and child to connect to Him, that is, repent and believe in Him. For on your own, you can do nothing. But united in Jesus, oh..there is much fruit! There is everything that a person needs for body and soul!

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

The unbelieving world tries over and over again to sell you a lie. What do I mean? The world would have you believe that you don't need the “I”. You don't need the “I am”. You can, on your own, by your own power and strength make the world a better place if you just find love within yourself. If you can come up with this love, then all the discord, hate, racism, “antiwhateverism” will suddenly disappear. If everyone would just love and be kind to one another then the world would have no more problems.

The only problem, and it's a big one, is that there is no love apart from Jesus. If Jesus is not connected to a person, there is no fruit of true love. For Jesus is the True Vine and He alone produces true fruit in His branches.

A popular song by the Beatles epitomizes this ideas that the world, on its own, can solve all its problems with its own love. “Love is all you need”. In the whole song, Jesus, of course, is not mentioned as the source of love. No, what is proclaimed as truth by the Beatles?

*“Nothing you can make that can't be made (love)
No one you can save that can't be saved (love)
Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time (love)
It's easy
All you need is love...*

*Nothing you can know that isn't known (love)
Nothing you can see that isn't shown (love)
There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be, it's easy
All you need is love (everybody now)*

You, you, you...you can do it...Well, this much is true. Love is needed. But one has to go to the source to find it...Jesus.

And our epistle from 1 John 4 tells us this truth.

“8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Where is love found? Not in ourselves... “not that we loved God”...not that the branch on its own could generate and create love. No...God is love. And He showed us His love by sending His only begotten Son into the world. For what purpose? That we might live through Him!!

God loved us with the loving work of His Son who gave Himself as an offering for our unloving sinful hearts... propitiation for our sins! Oh this is so important. Any thought of works righteousness...of our fruits saving us is removed. We are saved through our connection to the vine, through faith, and good works are the result, not the cause of our salvation!

What does Jesus say? **“3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”**

Already clean! Justified! Made holy! By the Gospel! By the Good News that Jesus paid for the sins of the world. And believing this Good News, Jesus connects you to Him through the gift of faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of God. Love is all you need, in Jesus, that is!

Jesus spoke these words of John 15 on Maundy Thursday. And the disciples watched the Vine Himself die on the cross. Life left His body. But the amazing thing was that the Vine did not decay. It did not wither in the grave. For the Vine was holy and the power of sin had not overcome it. But Jesus conquered all that is unloving, all the hatred of the world, all that is evil on the cross. He paid for it all with His precious life-giving blood!

And three days later, as Jesus had promised, over and over again, the True Vine, Jesus, burst forth from the tomb with life. He showed that He had conquered death and all who believe in Him also conquer death...now and eternally.

The eunuch in our first reading wanted to understand this as he read about how Jesus was led as a sheep to the slaughter. Yes, Jesus had to die to pay for all the sheep's sins. But, then Phillip, sent by the Holy Spirit, explained Scripture to him. **“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.”** He, of course, preached Jesus crucified and risen. And what was the eunuch's response? In faith, he wanted all the gifts that God was offering him. He wanted his relationship with Jesus to be sealed with the gift of baptism. He

wanted the connection to Jesus, his Vine, to be strong... I...you. There's water. I want to get baptized now!

And that is all you need! There is the love that you and I and every believer in Jesus needs and receives freely... the cleansing, the washing away of all sins. Indeed...you are already clean by the Word of God and are sealed with this cleansing in baptism!

And now you are sent, like Phillip, to tell others about the Vine and how there is life connected to Him, only to Him! You are sent to bear the fruit of His love with acts and words of love and service and kindness. And in Christ, it is much fruit! For Jesus cleanses all our works and makes them holy.

The students at our school are making a rock garden. And on their rocks, they are painting the fruits of the spirit...kindness and love. Connected to the Rock, Jesus, these fruits are born in us and only through Jesus are they born in us.

As Ephesians 4 says: **“Ephesians 4:32**

‘And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.’

Even as God in Christ forgave you. It all starts first with the great “I am” who forgives you so that you can then be kind and tenderhearted and forgiving to one another.

Two chapters earlier in Ephesians Paul tells us that we are not saved by our works, by our fruit but by grace.

“8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

And then Paul tells us what God has planned for His branches...an amazing life of good works and bearing of much fruit!

“10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Wow! The great “I am” created us...His workmanship... for good works in Him. He even prepared them ahead of time for us! “I and you” Jesus and you, walking together in His love, for His great loving purposes in your life. Vine and branches! Amen.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)