

## Being the Branches

Many of our students have just completed MCAS testing. Therefore, I am going to give you a sample question. Which one of the following does not belong: grapes, kiwi, apples, or tomatoes? If you guessed apples, you are correct. Apples grow on trees while the other fruits grow from some sort of vine.

If Jesus is the vine, then we are certainly the branches. What are the branches supposed to do? It is our job to produce fruit. This does not refer to us being fruitful in the realm of reproduction. However, if we do not spread seeds, as it were, no more fruit will grow.

In verse five of the reading, we are told “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing.” This may not seem true, at first blush. After all, many people are doing many good things apart from Jesus – worthwhile things, for their families, communities, and world. But they are not us. And we are not trying to do good things – we are trying to do Jesus things. We are trying to help usher in God’s loving kingdom. What could be more important than that? But we cannot do that apart from Jesus. We cannot be the people that God calls us to be, individually or as a church, apart from Jesus. In fact, we cannot do anything truly worthwhile for God and the world God loves, apart from Jesus.

This is the simple truth we are being reminded of today. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing that we will really care about, as his followers, in the end. Nothing. So, how do we make sure that we are not on our own, that we are not doing anything apart from Jesus? He tells us: “Abide in me.” Abide in Jesus. Just as he abides in us. Those who abide in Jesus bear much fruit. That’s it. That’s the answer. Abide in Jesus.

But, we may ask, how do we do that? How do we abide in Jesus? The answer is not some great mystery – it is exactly what we have always been taught, what the people of God have always tried to do, throughout the centuries, to abide in Jesus.

I believe that we have to pray every single day. You don't have to set the room, light a candle, and have a set order of worship. If you can do all of these things and they work for you, that is great, go for it. However, sometimes we can offer a simple prayer, i.e., "God, give me the gift of patience this day" or "God, help me to control my tongue in this difficult conversation." These quick little prayers remind us that we are not alone and that we rely on our Trinitarian God, either Creator, Son, or Holy Spirit to get us through the day.

And, if we want to abide in Jesus, we must worship each week, preferably where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus. This is essential if we are to abide in Jesus. No matter how good our week has been, and how faithful we have been in daily prayer and spending time with God's word, we tend to slip away from Jesus. There is just too much going on in this world, and in our life, for it to be otherwise. By the end of the week, we need to reset ourselves spiritually. And we do this by remembering the sabbath day and keeping it holy. We do this by worshiping together. But, I feel as though I am "preaching to the choir" since you are already here.

If we can exhibit patience, control our speech, and minister to those in need, this will go a long way to spread the seeds that will bear more fruit. We continue to spread the Gospel message in Westfield, Southwick, and beyond. Let us remember that apart from Jesus we can do nothing that truly matters. We need God, we need Jesus, we need the Holy Spirit. We can't bear fruit alone. We can't do anything in this world that God is calling us to do without Jesus. Individually. Or as a congregation.

If we want to continue to grow as a church, there is nothing more important for us to do than to abide in Jesus, so that we can bear his fruit. “Or God is glorified by this,” Jesus concludes this gospel reading, “that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Let us glorify God. Let us bear much fruit, as individuals, and as a congregation. Let us be known for our love, and our joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We don’t know when the HCAS, the Heavenly Comprehensive Assessment Survey, will come. Let’s practice for it now by abiding in Jesus as we bear much fruit. Amen!