

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of May 10, 2009

Abiding in the Words of Our Abiding Lord (John 15:1-8)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

“Jesus said, ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you.’”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, at this time of year in the spring many of think about our plants. We plant new ones; we plant flowers and watch them grow. We watch as the water and the sunshine nurture and mature them until they are in full bloom and beautiful. In today's text our Lord is also concerned with plant-life, specifically with the branches of the plant. Jesus says, “I am the true Vine”, “my Father is the Vinedresser”, and “you are the branches”. It is a description of relationships: God the Father's relationship to the Son and God's relationship to us.

It is really a perfect description of God's care as He works to grow and mature His people. Plants take a lot of care. They need the right amount of sun, the right amount of water, and they require careful attention. We see this in the picture of the Vinedresser who carefully examines the branches and prunes them to make them bear more fruit. This is similar to the attention that God gives to His people, to you. Isn't it amazing that God, as infinitely huge as He is, is deeply concerned with every aspect of our lives. He concerns Himself with our character and shaping us to become more and more like Him. God is present everywhere and while He balances the vast things of the universe with all their constellations He is also intensely interested in the details of your life and your relationship with Him.

On this Mothers' Day we are reminded of a special relationship that comes out of God's love. We celebrate the care that mothers so often take in nurturing children. God's love is so deep and vast that it overflows into our relationships, especially the intimate relationship between mother and child. Being a mother is one of the very most difficult callings in the world and yet it can also be the most rewarding and fruitful. In addition to giving us birth and bringing us into this world, the words and life-lessons of our mothers have played an enormous part in our upbringing.

Our mothers' words of instruction as we grew up have helped mould us into who we are today. And this is an extension of God's words of life. Our Lord works through people and especially through mothers and fathers to grow us, to raise us and mould and shape us. Where would we be if we ignored our mothers' instruction to eat our

vegetables, for instance? If, as kids we were left to eat whatever we wanted, cookies and ice cream we would have soon found ourselves in a sickly condition. In the same way, Jesus gives us His words to make us strong spiritually, to make us healthy and fruitful in His family, in His kingdom.

We have all heard the hymn, "Abide with Me". It is a comforting spiritual song about God's presence. We find comfort in His presence especially in time of crisis such as at funerals when we are more starkly faced with our own mortality. We want to know that He is abiding with us and this is a good thing. And yet, during the everyday events of our lives it seems we too often forget our need to abide in Him. This is our Lord's message today. He says, "The branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the Vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

He says, "Every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." God's work is ongoing in your life. We are a work in progress. The kind of fruit that Jesus speaks of here is the virtues of a Godly life. St. Paul mentions this in Galatians chapter 5. He calls them fruits of the Spirit. The list includes "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

The Vine is what gives life to the branches and if the branches are not connected and don't feed on the vine, they won't bear these fruits and they will eventually wither away and die. Eventually they will not be useful anymore and they will be gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. And so, our Lord Jesus strongly encourages us to remain in Him. He is the life; apart from Him is only death ultimately. The consequence of not abiding in Him is final judgement, condemnation, eternal death, separation from God.

And so our need to abide in Christ is clear. Now how do we do it? It is simply this: Hear His Word; meditate on His teachings; seek to apply them everyday. Live through Him. The old Lutheran Hymnal used the phrase 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' His Word. Live and breathe it. And we can do this because of who we have in Scripture. We have Christ. In Him the Word of God is sweeter than honey. In Him we have a Saviour and we have a God who is concerned, who gives grace to help, who will never leave us or forsake us.

Last week we talked about our need to hear the voice the Good Shepherd. Friends, there are so many voices clamoring for our attention today through all sorts of mediums; T.V. movies, radio, magazines...The messages can be confusing. We need to have our ears tuned to the one voice that speaks spiritual truth in the midst of all the confusion. The words of Jesus are nourishment and life to us. They are the words of eternal life.

And so to abide in Christ we must continue to listen; in church, in devotions and in our speaking about God with each other. We might try listening to an audio Bible when at home or in the car. Or when we're on the bus we might try reciting a psalm. We go to church each Sunday and this is wonderful but our spiritual well-being needs a steady intake of the bread of life. In church we receive a feast of God's Word in the readings,

hopefully in the sermon, in the liturgy, and in the Lord's Supper. But one meal a week is not enough to keep us healthy. And so we must abide in Jesus' words and chew on them every day. This is what makes us healthy so we can be fruitful in His kingdom.

One of the things that plants require to grow is sunlight. The Bible is the sunlight to our souls, to our spiritual life. Are you reading your Bible?

Friends, in our culture today there is great emphasis placed on the individual; on me and my rights and my choices; my preferences. Sadly, oftentimes God is forgotten. We have been guilty of trying to reduce God and making Him fit into our plans instead of vice-versa. But here, Jesus reminds us that He is the source; He is the Almighty. We are tiny and we need connection with the Almighty each day. Thankfully, He is present to supply whatever we need. He reminds us of His love in Jesus who laid down His life for us and rose again.

Jesus says to His disciples, "You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you" Now the disciples were far from perfect. They were slow to believe. They didn't quite get Jesus' teachings, at least not until later. On the night when He was betrayed they would abandon Jesus, Peter would deny Him and yet knowing that these things, Jesus said, "You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you". To use an analogy, His Word is like the ultimate Javex, the ultimate bleach for unbleachables. He washes the stains of sin and by His blood He makes us as white as snow. We are counted as clean when we remain in Jesus. The branches have life when they remain in the Vine.

And so our Lord gives a most serious and urgent invitation: to be saturated with His Word; to have it occupy our thoughts. For then it begins to permeate the things we do and this sprouts into more and more fruit.

And so on this Mothers' Day, as we celebrate all the good things our mothers have taught and done for us, let us keep in mind that even though mothers like all of us are not perfect, we are counted as clean through Jesus. And through His Word of Law and Gospel He continues to make us clean and prune us each day. Let us continue to hear His abiding Word. It will never steer you wrong. And by the grace of God may we be to the world a window to our Heavenly Father. May the fruit of His Word abide in you always. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.