

INI-SDG

In the Name of Jesus – To God Alone the Glory

5.10.2009 Cantate – St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to all of you this morning from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This summer my family and I will have been here in California for two years. I mention the time because I still remember very clearly driving into Sacramento and down along the East Bay right around the south tip of the bay into Mountain View. I remember it clearly because I recall how impressed I was to see so many varieties of trees, plants, and flowers. Since that time I am still learning how to take care of the different trees and flowers we have growing around the parsonage. And I am always looking forward to the new flower blooms that come so often and even more so with proper pruning.

Since today is Mother's Day, it is nice that the Lord would have a section from His Word that speaks about gardening, vines, branches, and fruit. You would probably have a difficult time shopping for a dead bouquet that was all withered with little or no flowers on it. But even more difficult would be trying to find someone who was looking for a bouquet like that for his or her mother. What would be the point? Not to mention, what kind of message would that be sending to the mother, or to others about how he or she felt about his or her mother? Our Savior makes a very similar comparison for us this morning when He speaks about what it means for us to be a child of our Heavenly Father.

NIV John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will 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.

Let's pause there for a moment and look at what the Word of God illustrates for us here this morning. This passage came up in Bible class last Sunday. One of the first things that we ought to remember is what Jesus begins by saying here. Jesus says **I am...the true vine**. Jesus uses this phrasing often throughout His ministry. In the Gospel of John alone by example Jesus had already said ***I am the bread of life (6:35)***. ***I am the light of the world (8:12)***. Or as last week seeing how we are just like wayward sheep Jesus reminds us when He says, ***I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (10:11)***. Even the significance of that phrase "I am" Jesus revealed to some unbelieving Jews when He said ***"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*** In saying to them "I am," Jesus was using the same phrasing that the Almighty God used for Himself from the burning bush with Moses.

When Jesus describes Himself in verse one saying **I am the true vine**. What does He mean? The Greek helps us to give a fuller meaning of the word "true" there as the word thankfully also expresses the thought of Jesus being a very "dependable" vine. [Recently I was up in wine country with my father and we of course saw many, many vines. One thing that caught my eye was the thickness of some of those vines and how dependable and profitable they must have continued to be over so many years.] Throughout the course of time, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the true, dependable vine has provided the necessary nutrients for the world. He was the promised "Branch," "Root," or "Seed" of salvation God had promised would come since the fall into sin back in the Garden of Eden. That is why we look at verse 4 of our text in which Jesus importantly emphasizes to His believing disciples, **4 Remain in me, and I will 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**. What truth does Jesus express to His disciples of all time once again here? There is NO OTHER vine. Jesus had said similarly another "I am" statement in the previous chapter of ***John 14:6 ...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me***. There is one Way. There is one Vine. No other way is dependable. No other way is profitable to give truth or eternal life. Therefore, Jesus reveals to us this morning again that 1) He is the eternal "I am" Lord God, and 2) He is active in our lives.

Individuals, by the grace of God, may be able to see the connection in the Bible of Jesus being true God, but they will however, often have a lot of difficulty seeing how He is truly active in our lives. And so that brings us to the need for understanding our theme for the week:

1. **Remember God's Purpose of Pruning** shows His activity through His Word.

[Over the years I've noticed that simply picking up a bag of flowers and dropping them into a vase doesn't quite cut it. In fact, I've learned rather quickly that the flowers need to be cut to the right length, dead leaves and thorns may be pulled off, and as well that water and nutrients are essential in preserving the life and beauty of the flowers.] When we are reminded that God our Heavenly Father is the Gardener, Jesus tells us in verse 2 of our text that **2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.** Jesus is illustrating for us the ACTION that He and His Father continue to show in our lives. The word "prune" there in verse 2 shows the act of cleaning up the branches. And the word "clean" in verse 3 is the result of the Word of forgiveness given from the I AM God...Jesus Christ. We have a very active God who is illustrated here as a very active life-giving vine as well as a very active gardener. But Jesus goes on in verses 5-8 to even further explain for us **God's Purpose of Pruning.**

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

I'll often cite verse 5 of John chapter 15 in speaking about our conversion. Apart from Jesus the vine, we can do nothing to contribute to our faith. ***No man can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:3)*** Apart from the Word that makes us clean, we are dead branches. Judas Iscariot had denied the Word and did not believe in the full forgiveness found in Christ alone. His greed is a perfect example of the result of him being a dead branch. So therefore we carefully heed Jesus' warning that we ought to:

2. **Remember God's Purpose of Pruning** is to bring forth fruit!

In our verses today Jesus speaks of two different groups of branches very clearly. 1) Those that do NOT bear fruit. 2) Those that bear fruit. For those who do not continue to hear and listen to as we mentioned in verse 3 the Word that cleans, and if anyone does not remain in Christ Jesus verse 6 says clearly that **he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.** Without the water, nourishment, and energy from Jesus the true vine this is the end result – a dead branch. As ***Ephesians 2*** points out, ***you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*** Anyone not in Christ is dead, just as we all are by nature. A dead branch does nothing. John the Baptizer and Jesus both warned the scribes and Pharisees that they ought to ***produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*** The result of God's Word reveals that we are sinners who don't deserve the blessings we have been given, even the blessing of faith in Christ our Savior.

What we have been talking about really isn't that different than what we also are celebrating today is it? Mother's Day is a day to remember the one who gave birth to us into this world. It is a day to appreciate whatever our mother has actively done for us too isn't it? We probably remember certain meals we really liked, and certain meals we didn't. We might consider the embarrassing clothes that were either hand-me-downs or simply not cool or in "style." We might painfully recall the timeouts, spankings, soapy mouthwash, or loss of toys, tempers, and night time curfews all too well. But have we forgotten too quickly the reason that all these things were done? It is Love.

Mothers and fathers alike would not take the time to show such love if they did not have such love for their child. How is this truth about tough love any different from our Father in Heaven? He wants what's best for us. He wants us to remember that He is the One who knit us together in our mother's womb and gave us life in this world. He is the One who deserves our appreciation every day for the meals we eat, for the clothes we wear, and for all the discipline and instruction in righteousness that comes out of His mouth found in the Bible. Have we forgotten too quickly the reason that all these are done? Have we forgotten His love? Do we remember that He has given us through Jesus Christ our Savior white robes of righteousness? Do we wear these spotless robes proudly as children of God or are they simply not cool or in "style" for us to really enjoy? Unlike the branches that have rejected Jesus the true vine we have great comfort in the fact that our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together as one to LOVINGLY prune us through the Word of God to bear fruits of repentance and faith.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

What joy we have in being connected to the Jesus the true vine who gives us everything we need according to His will; and that our prayerful petitions are prompted by the Vine we grow from. What great comfort we have in the triumph we have in Christ in view of our sin and spiritual deadness, in knowing as Ephesians 2 continued on to say that **4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.** What mercy we have been given to hear the words of our "I am" Savior Jesus Christ assuring us that ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. (John 11:25)***

Today, we remember mothers day and catch a glimpse of the type of love our Lord God has for us. With joy and comfort we see the love of the one and only dependable Vine, and the love of the Gardener who continues to actively work to make us fruitful just as Jesus says in verse **8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.** Throughout California we see in late September and October a whole lot of fruit of the vine. As Disciples of Christ, our fruit in Him isn't a once a season type of harvest, but a continuous growth that sprouts from the continuous love that is revealed, demonstrated, and shown to us through our Lord's very active Word. **Remember God's Purpose of Pruning...** is done so that you and I will glorify Him. Amen.

This love of God that surpasses all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and minds through our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.