

September 29, 2019

"I am the..."

"I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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."



"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. 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."

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:1-8

As is so often the case with the words of Jesus, the things that were familiar in his day are lost on us. This dialogue on fruit and vines is really foreign to most of us, but in Jesus' time everyone recognized the basis of his lesson, because nearly every community hosted at least one vineyard.

So, when Jesus talks about the vine he is pulling up a vision in the minds of his hearers of the daily and familiar operation of a vineyard. In any vineyard the gardeners or vinegrowers spend their days carefully pruning the vines. Branches that do not bear any grapes are cut off so that the vines are only feeding the fruit-bearing branches. The branches that do bear fruit are trimmed so that only a few leaves are left so that, again, the vine is completely dedicated to the production of fruit. Vines that don't produce fruit are useless and are pulled up to make room for the fruit-bearers.

Our role in the church, the body of Christ, is very much like the scene our Lord describes here. When we are saved it is not just for our own good; God is also saving us for his purpose which is always and only, to seek and save the lost. God's mission does not end in our salvation, but in the salvation of all souls who will accept his grace. So, as believers we must become the fruit-bearers we were saved to be. This concept, sadly, has always become a huge burden for most of us.

Most of us as Christians, have come to believe that fruit-bearing is our job, and our job alone. And because we believe this half-truth we are constantly haunted by the fear that we are not doing enough fruit-bearing and that we live in constant danger of being cut-off and burned.

To accept this idea is to completely miss the point. Jesus makes it clear in this part of his discussion, ***"If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*** It is always and only our relationship with Jesus that makes us fruit-bearers not our own efforts.

Since we are generally not familiar with grape vines and vineyards, think of something we are more familiar with. I grew up around apple trees. We had three in the back yard. I still remember the blossoms covering the trees in the spring and then falling to the ground a few weeks later. I remember eating the green apples long before they were ripe and I remember harvesting whatever was left in the fall so that my mom could make apple sauce and apple butter and apple jelly.

The one thing I do not remember is my Mom and Dad doing anything to those trees to make them produce apples. Those trees produced apples because they were apple trees. They were doing what they were created to do; nothing more, nothing less.

Believers are much like the branches on those apple trees. As long as they were attached to the trunk of the tree they were going to produce apples. They can't help it. The branches on an apple tree have to produce apples.

In the same way my fruit-bearing as a believer is always about my connection to Jesus. On my own I am nothing and I can do nothing. No matter how hard I work at it, no matter how many doors I knock, no matter how many Bible studies I schedule, I will never be a fruit-bearer unless I am connected to Jesus.

But, if I enjoy a very a real, intimate, life changing relationship with Jesus; if his Spirit is transforming me into his image in hundreds of ways every day, If I have surrendered to his direction, then I will produce fruit. I have to because I am a branch and Jesus is my vine. Through our relationship he will produce fruit and souls will be saved. Through our relationship he will produce fruit and his Father will be glorified.

