

February 1, 2015

Who is Jesus?

"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. 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples..."
John 15:1-8

We don't live in wine country, so understanding what Jesus is talking about in today's context is a bit more difficult for us. In a vineyard where grapes are being grown in order to make wine the vines are carefully planted in rows and as they grow they are constantly trimmed and pruned. In fact in some ways a working vineyard looks more like a hillside full of dead sticks than it does a growing, flourishing vineyard.

The point of carefully and constantly pruning and trimming the vines is so that all of their energy goes into producing the best possible grapes. The vines have not been planted to look pretty, but to produce fruit. Any vine that does not produce fruit even when it is carefully tended and pruned is dug up and destroyed. A vineyard is like any other business. It's all about the product.

In many ways that is true for us as followers of Jesus as well. Jesus did not make the ultimate sacrifice on the cross so that you and I could fill church pews on a Sunday morning. He saved us from the consequences of our sinful choices through his death so that like well-tended vines in a vineyard we can be productive. For us it is also all about the product, and like a vine in a vineyard, being unproductive will end in our destruction.

What does it mean for us to be productive? Quite simply it means we are reproducing our faith. If I have great faith in Jesus then that faith will reproduce itself in those around me. It really can't help but do so. My faith will reproduce itself in my family, in my friends, among those who know me and who spend time in my presence. My faith, if it is real, will touch them and influence them toward faith as well.

There are of course a number of things that can get in the way of my being productive. I can disconnect from Jesus. Anyone who has ever found a dead branch after a windstorm should understand this. That branch which has fallen is dead. It is unlikely that it can be reattached and even more unlikely that it will ever bear fruit. Cleaning up after a windstorm usually involves gathering up what has blown down and burning it or throwing it away. If I allow myself to be disconnected from Jesus that will be my outcome as well.

My ability to share my faith does not come from me anymore than the ability to reproduce comes from a single branch. The branch reproduces when it is attached to the tree and I will be productive when I am connected to Jesus. It isn't really up to me to go out and try to be productive. It is up to me to be open to Jesus working through me to create faith in those around me.

Even productive vines have to be pruned of unnecessary leaves and shoots. In the same way we allow a lot of unnecessary stuff to clutter up our lives and Jesus will, if we let him, cut those distractions away so that our lives can produce his Father's glory.

As the Master tells his disciples on this final night with them, we live in a dangerous world. To be productive in such a place would be impossible for us if we were to try to do it on our own, but because we are connected to the Lord, we have the ability to share our faith.