

John 15:1-8 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² 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. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

Every year on the second Sunday in May, I struggle a little bit about my sermon. I question whether I should preach about the text assigned for the week in the church year, in this case the gospel lesson from John 15 which helps us to continue our Easter celebration, or whether should I take the time to talk about mothers in the light of scriptures. As I went through this question in my mind this year and as I studied the Gospel text assigned for this week, I couldn't help but notice how the image of the vine and the image of mother are quite similar.

Jesus uses the imagery of the vine. He is the vine. Abide in him, and bear fruit. Abide not in him, and die. As long as we remain in Jesus, we bear much fruit. If we not abide in him, we wither and die, and will be cast into the fire.

Jesus could have just as easily used the image of a mother and her infant child to make the same point. He could have said. I am the mother. The child that abides with me will live. The child that abides not with me will die.

You see, both vines and mothers are the very source of life to the things that come forth from them. Both children and vine branches depend on their source, be it the vine or their mother, for their very life.

The truth that mothers are the source of all life was solidified way back in the garden. As it is recorded in the scripture, "Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." Yes indeed all humanity owes their life ultimately to Eve and each child quite directly owes their life to their mother.

Especially in countries less fortunate than ours where things like formula are much less common, it is true that a child must abide with their mother or else die. In these countries, if a child is abandoned or taken away from their mother, those infants simply cannot survive on their own.

This is exactly the point which Jesus wants to make with his image of the vine and the branches. This is exactly the point that Jesus wants to make to us today about our spiritual life. If we do not abide with him, we cannot survive. We cannot produce anything good. We will not mature. Apart from him we can do nothing and we will eventually die.

But on the more positive side, a child who remains with his or her mother in any country grows and eventually becomes a productive human. Remaining with one's mother means life.

Jesus presents in his own image of the vine and the branches this positive message as well. He says that if we abide in him, we will not only survive but thrive. We will produce good things, good works. Just as it is only natural for a babe abiding with its mother to grow, Jesus tells us that it is only natural for one abiding in him to do good works.

But I must admit that Jesus didn't use the image of mothers and infant children to make this point. He chose the image of a vine and its branches. And I think I know why. Jesus needed to make two things clear that the image of mothers and children might not make clear. The first is this. Unlike babes who eventually grow old enough and so become free of an immediate need for their mother to live, we as Christians never grow old enough to become free of Jesus and be able to continue to live. We never get mature enough that we can separate from Jesus, and still produce good fruit. No like the vine branch, apart from the vine, whether that branch is a brand new one or one that has been on the vine for many years, the branch can do nothing.

And this is a good reminder to us. Last week we celebrated confirmation. In all too many cases, youth after confirmation tend to separate themselves from the vine feeling that they have learned it all and finished the course. They separate themselves from Jesus by failing to study the bible with their church, by choosing activities other than church for their Sunday mornings, and by neglecting to receive the Lord's Supper. And when they do this, they think they are alright at first. After all they look like a branch fresh off the vine still full of plump grapes. But slowly that fruit in their life shrivels up into raisins, and eventually they produce nothing more. Why? Because apart from the vine, we can do nothing. We can produce no fruit.

But this is not just about confirmands. It is about you and me as well. Regardless of our age there can be a temptation to think that we have learned it all and no longer need to be intimately connected regularly to

the vine in order to produce fruit. We can begin to think that fruit-producing is something we have learned how to do a long time ago and can simply do now on our own. And so we can begin to neglect bible study assuming that we have nothing left to learn. We can allow ourselves to be distracted in church as the Word is read and proclaimed. And we can come to the Lord's Supper out of habit rather than out of a pure desire to receive. And if we do these things, we are separating ourselves from the vine.

Better by far to abide in Jesus in every way. Better to gather with our fellow believers for bible study. Better to ponder the word of God as it is read and proclaimed. Better to long for the opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper. Better because God assures us that abiding in him means an abundant joyful life of producing good fruit. It means the fulfillment of our desire for purpose in life. It means that those living around us will be blessed.

The other reason I am sure that Jesus chose the image of the vine and the branches rather than mothers and their infant children is because he also wanted to remind us that God at times must do some. He must remove from us the dead wood that we have allowed to grow in our life. At the time, pruning hurts. It hurts as God removes from us bad habits that have been comforting to us in the past or that have given us pleasure in the past. It hurts as he removes our excuses for not revering his Word and studying it with his people. It hurts as he removes people from us that have done nothing but cause us to sin. But while pruning always hurts, it also always produces better fruit in our life.

Yes, Jesus used the image of the vine to assure us of several truths. He used it to assure us that we are clean vines washed in Baptism. We are clean vines that produce good fruit. That is our identity as his children. He used the image to remind us that fruitless branches are not connected to the vine even if they are all twisted and mixed up with those branches that truly are connected. He used the image to remind us that without him we can do nothing. And he used the image to remind us that in order to produce the best fruit, God prunes each one of his branches.

And Jesus tells us that by all of this the Father is glorified, when bear much fruit and so prove to be his disciples. Yes as we abide in Jesus and Jesus in us, we produce good works that those around us are blessed to see. And when they see them, our father is glorified. And rightfully so, for he planted the true vine Jesus deep

into the soil by his death and caused him to grow up from that soil by his resurrection. And then he connected you and me to that vine as he sent out his apostles to baptize and to teach. He sent them out that one day we each would be connected to the vine Jesus, become clean branches, and begin to produce good fruit. All of this is God's work and, therefore, when the fruit begins to form on the branches and the good works flow from your life and mine, it is God himself that is glorified.

Jesus says, "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. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Amen.