

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

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.

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. **This is God’s Word**

Dear fellow branches,

It’s all about connections – who you know. When you are looking for a job, you are encouraged to network and make connections with people who can help you find just the right job. When you retire you are encouraged to make connections with other people so that loneliness and depression don’t set in. Even when it comes to our spiritual lives, we need to have connections – we need to be connected to Jesus.

As we think about life, some of our connections are temporary – we make them for a specific purpose and when that need is met, we may no longer need the connections. Some connections become weak over time and eventually are lost as well. But when it comes to our spiritual life, our connection with Jesus is something we don’t want to lose. Matter of fact, our connection with Jesus is essential for our spiritual life and for our everlasting life in heaven.

That is why Jesus encourages us in this portion of scripture to, “**Remain in me.**” He tells us to Remain in Me because he wants me to, “**Remain Spiritually Healthy,**” and the consequent result will be that as I live my life I will be able to, “**Give Glory to God.**”

I. As we think about our Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – it becomes easier to see the symbolism in the picture that Jesus paints for us in this portion of scripture.

God the Father is the gardener – the one who protects and preserves what is in the vineyard.

Jesus, the Son, is the “true vine.” In other words, he is the source of life for the plant itself and the branches connected to the “true vine.”

The branches are Christians and former Christians.

The **life giving connection** between the true vine and the branches is **faith** – faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit and is necessary for spiritual life.

As Jesus describes the Father, he tells us, **“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.”** The Father is a results oriented gardener – he is looking for a response to the gift of faith. That would be the results of being connected to the “true vine.” These would be things that the believer does as a result of having Christ in his heart.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians describes this fruit of faith, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23). These characteristics are evident when we Come to church to nourish our faith, or when we sing in the choir, or usher, or help out on work days, or participate on a board or committee, or pray for individuals or specific ministry needs, or helping with VBS, or help someone in need with a ride or groceries or invite your friends to come and hear about Jesus or when you listen to someone in need or help them in some way and the list could go on and on. Some of these things you are doing and some will be opportunities that God has already prepared for you as a way to let your faith shine.

And yet, some of the branches don't bear fruit. Maybe they once did but their connection with the “true vine” has grown weak or even been severed and they have withered and died.

Signs that a branch is no longer connected or that the connection is getting weak might be not having time to hear God's Word, choosing the way of the world rather than God's path, finding fault with everything the church is doing and sowing seeds of discontent and even persecuting or making fun of Christians or just not caring when it comes to your spiritual life. The gardener tries to coax life from these branches but when that life disappears, he prunes the dead branches. That work had already begun among the disciples as Jesus tells them, **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”** Later on, Jesus would encourage his disciples to continue his work by telling them to, **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”** (John 17:17)

So how do you become cleansed and remain as healthy branches? The answer is simple, **“Remain in Jesus,”** but the application of those words is a little more difficult. For you confirmands, this is an exciting time in your lives. Today you will be confirmed and next week you will be able to receive the Lord's Supper with your families and your church family, and in about four weeks you will be graduating from 8th grade. Next year you will be entering high school. That's great – I and your parents and your friends are excited for you and wish you well but we also know that there will be many more distractions in life and some of these distractions will try to cut you off from the “true vine” – from Jesus.

It might be the activities that you get involved in that take so much time that church becomes a low priority. Or maybe you'll make new friends but they might not be the best influence in your life and they may encourage you down a path that leads you away from God and his Word. You are not alone, adults face many different distractions and temptations that try to draw us away from Christ as well.

How do you know if you are remaining in Christ or in danger of being pruned? James tells us, **“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”** (James 2:17). In other words, are the fruits of your faith evident in your lives? Are you living your life

for Christ and is he the motivation for all that you do? This is where parents and grandparents are so important for the young people of our congregation.

You have a responsibility to encourage and support your children in their faith life. They need your help and sometimes you need their help and encouragement too – that is what family is all about. Growing in God’s grace together. Gathering around God’s Word together.

We all need to stay connected to Jesus. We know we’re not perfect and there are times when we will give into the influences around us and into our own sinful nature. But once again, it is the good news of God’s Word that picks us up and announces God’s forgiveness to us. It’s God’s Word that nourishes us and gives us strength and direction back onto a path that bears fruit and as we bear fruit, we also give glory to God.

II. These words before us this morning are important – so important that Jesus repeated them again for us: **“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... ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** Jesus speaks the phrase, **“Remain in me”** five times in our sermon text to emphasize how important that is for us to stay spiritually healthy and to bear fruit – and as we do that, we glorify God with our lives.

Without Jesus in our lives we can do nothing to please God but with him at the center of our lives, **“[We] can do all things through him who gives [us] strength.”** (Philippians 4:13). Think of Peter, who hours after Jesus spoke these words denied his relationship with Jesus. What sorrow that brought into his life when he separated himself from his Savior in this way. And what joy he felt when Jesus reinstated him and assured him that his sin was forgiven and he would have the joy of bearing fruit and giving glory to God with his life.

There are only two types of people in this world. Those who are connected to Jesus through faith and those who are not. How we live is an indication of whether that connection is there or not. Paul reminds us that if we are connected to Jesus then, **“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.”** (I Corinthians 10:31).

Today we want to celebrate the confirmation of Grayson and Sam as they publicly proclaim their faith in Jesus – their connection to the true vine. But we also want them to remember that Confirmation is not graduation. It is not the end of your spiritual training – at least I hope it isn’t. This morning as you publicly profess your faith in Jesus – that you are one of his living branches and you will promise to remain faithful, even to the point of death. That means that you will continue to nurture and feed your faith and produce fruits of faith as you give glory to God and your parents will stand with you and promise to help and encourage you. You have your church family to encourage you and best of all, you have God’s help as well. Our Savior loves us and wants to help us remain spiritually healthy.

As we consider the words of our sermon text, then, what kind of branch are we? We all want to be one of the strong, flourishing branches and we can be one of those branches as we stay connected to Jesus. He keeps us healthy by bringing us forgiveness. He prunes us at **times** by guiding us away from temptation and calling us to repentance when we need it. He gives us one another, brothers and sisters in Christ, to encourage, pray for and help one another. May God help us to remain in him. Amen.