**Bearing Fruit That Will Last**

John 15:1-17
Key Verse 15:16 – *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*

Over the last few weeks, we have studied Jesus’ upper room dialogue with His disciples. With His time on earth now nearing its end, Jesus used this moment to reveal the most important teachings of all to His disciples. In last week’s passage, Jesus even describes His departure as a good thing for He would be sending another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to remain with them always and guide them into knowing our Heavenly Father all-the-more. But while this gift of having God’s presence dwell within them at all times is wonderful, the disciples still a very practical concern; “What do we do now?” In our present culture, there is a strong emphasis placed on finding your purpose, mission, life goal, raison d'être, etc. At every stage of life, we feel pressured to search for and do something grand and recognizable to show our lives have meaning. The disciples faced that same pressure and uncertainty of what to do once their Master was no longer there to lead the way. In today’s passage, Jesus illustrates their new purpose through the example of the vine and the branches. Jesus calls on all His believers to go out into the world and bear long-lasting fruit which can only be done by remaining in Him in every moment. This is not something born out of our own choosing but is the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ who enables us to do so. I pray we may learn what it means to remain in Him and joyfully acknowledge what a great privilege it is to be chosen for His good purpose.

**Part 1: I am the True Vine**

Look at verse 1, ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”*** This is the last of Jesus’ “I AM” statements and given the time at which He made this declaration, we need to delve deeper into the rich history behind it. The image of the vine was a vivid one for them, since the land of Israel was covered with vineyards, serving as an illustration of how much God made them flourish and prosper as a nation. At one point in their history, the symbol of the vine was even on their coins. Yet the best example in the Old Testament is how God used the vineyard as a symbol for Israel’s own relationship with Him. But Isaiah’s prophecy spoke of Israel as a vineyard that produced only wild grapes (Isaiah 5:7). So as Jesus and the disciples were making their way out of the city of Jerusalem and into the Garden of Gethsemane, imagine them passing through a vineyard. When Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” He probably meant something like this: “You know that the vine is symbolic of Israel that is supposed to produce the best grapes but the nation has failed to do so. I, on the other hand, am the authentic Vine and I will fulfill everything suggested by that symbol.” If this had taken place here in Canada, Jesus would have used a maple tree as an example. The point is that God the maintains and cares for His people just as the gardener maintains and cares for every one of his plants

Verse 2 extends the analogy, ***“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.”*** Most people think once a fruit-bearing plant emerges from the soil, has grown to a decent size and starts sprouting fruit, the gardener’s job is done. However, those familiar with gardening know that the work has only begun. There is still the laborious task of pruning. When the gardener goes through the vineyard with his pruning knife, he does not randomly cut and slice without regard. He has a definite purpose, and that purpose is to produce the best fruit possible from his vineyard. The gardener achieves this by going over every branch of the vine, cutting off the ones that bear no fruit to make those that do even more fruitful. From the branches’ perspective, it feels cruel but this is ultimately done from the branches’ own benefit. A branch does not have beautiful flowers to gaze at or produce an exquisite aroma for us to inhale deeply. Its leaves offer no shade and its tiny, fragile wood is of no use. So the only purpose of the branch is to produce delicious grapes and cannot do so without drastic pruning.

God had expected Israel to bear succulent and delicious grapes but the only grapes He got from them were rotten, stinking and sour. When God looks at your life and mine, He has the same expectations. The Bible teaches that God expects to bear the fruit of the Spirit; “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a). When our Heavenly Gardener picks up his Pruning Knife, He does so with that purpose in mind. For instance, if there is something in my life that is preventing me from producing love, He will work in me until I have fulfilled that purpose. However, although we have the gift of the Spirit in us at all times, we clearly do not produce fruit in accordance with the Spirit all the time. Why is this so? Sometimes we go through many seasons with not a fruit in sight for we bear something in our heart that prevents us from doing so. We devote ourselves and of energies to dead and sickly branches. So take a moment to think about what in your life is preventing you from producing the fruit of joy, or peace, or kindness, etc? What are the dead and sickly branches in your own life you are holding on to? And are you willing to let God prune you so you may bear the kind of fruit He is looking for? We must always remember our Heavenly Father has a purpose when He begins to cut and prune and cleanse. He does not do it randomly, but with a sharp focus. He knows exactly what he is doing, and he always follows a plan. As Jeremiah 29:11 states: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” His goal is to prune, and prune, and He will keep on pruning until He sees good fruit in us!

Left to our own devices, we will always produce rotten fruit. Yet God moves among us with His Pruning Knife to remove those dead and useless branches from our hearts such as bitterness, resentment, selfishness, anger, self-centeredness, arrogance, pride. Verse 3 adds on to this by saying, ***“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”*** Just as a vine must be cleansed from insects, mildew, and fungus, God uses His own word to cleanse our lives and hearts from those things that should not be there, those things that prevent us from our ultimate, intended fruitfulness. Hence, we really need to devote ourselves to knowing His word fully so we may be like the blessed man in the opening verses of the Book of Psalms: “… whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers” (Psalms 1:2-3).

**Part 2: “Remain In Me”**

Let us read verses 4 and 5 together, ***“Remain in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*** While the task of bearing spiritual fruit may seem daunting, Jesus offers the secret for doing so… by remaining in Him. But what does “remain” mean here? At this point, Jesus was the one leaving the disciples so how could they remain in Him? The Greek word used for remain, “*meinate*” is used to describe a deep, intimate and loving relationship. Jesus used another variant of this word when describing Our Father’s house in John 14 as our home we share together as members of God’s family. Jesus is inviting us to join Him in this loving relationship and remain in Him forever. So how is remaining in Him connected to the vine and branches?

All the branch needs to do is to be an extension of the vine. It doesn’t have to produce life. It just receives life from the vine. It doesn’t have to decide what kind of fruit to produce. As the life of the vine flows through it, the branch will naturally produce the fruit consistent with what the vine is. The life is in the vine. The vine does it all. The vine extends its roots into the soil and draws the minerals and nutrients and moisture. The vine sends the sap to the branches so that fruit can bud forth. It is impossible for a branch to function as a vine. The branch does not have life in itself. It is totally dependent on the vine for its life and productivity. The great mistake we make in life is that we try to be the vine when all we have to be is a branch. We try to be the source when in truth, we are merely the recipients. Life is very frustrating when we try to be the vine. An example of this is the discouragement and frustration in our Christian’s lives when we try to live a holy life and do the right thing solely by our own strength. We want to accomplish great things for God and please God but only find ourselves doing the exact opposite. We try to live a perfect Christian life but the problem is that it is us trying to live it rather than Jesus living it within us. We try to live our lives as if we were the vines and Jesus is an attachment to us—a kind of support to help us do what we want to do... a mere add-on to help us achieve our own goals and our desires. But Jesus wants us to understand the truth. He is not an attachment to our lives; we are an attachment to HIS life. He is not dependent upon us. We are dependent upon Him. All we need to do is to draw from Him who is the source of everything in this world and all that is good in life.

Verses 5 to 8 further highlight the sheer folly of trying to the vine by our own determination and endeavour. In trying to find purpose and productivity apart from Christ, we actually achieve the opposite result by becoming bereft of our God-given purpose and useless in displaying God’s glory. Verse 7 additionally notes the importance of prayer. In this case, our prayer is an active desire to remain in Him and aligning our will to His so we may bear spiritual fruit.

**Part 3: “I Have Chosen You”**

Look at verses 9 and 10; ***“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”*** At the very start of the “upper room dialogue,” Jesus is described as taking this moment to show His disciples the full extent of His love (John 13:1). He even gave the disciples a higher level version of the “greatest commandment” by teaching His disciples to love one another in the same way that Jesus had loved them (John 13:34-35). Now Jesus is calling His disciples to remain in that loving relationship by keeping His commands… not out of loyalty to a master but as a tangible sign of devotion to their Lord and their God. Jesus was asking them to display the kind of love that would allow them to lay down one’s life for each other (John 15:13) and which Jesus Himself put on full display for the entire world through His death on the cross. However, it is at this point that Jesus describes the new nature of their relationship; ***“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you”*** (John 15:14-15). In telling them all these things, Jesus had placed His trust in His disciples to live in the same way He set before them. It is incredible that Jesus would entrust the very keys to His kingdom to a group of squabbling misfits who, just a few hours earlier, were more concerned about who was the greatest instead our their Master’s impending death. But why on earth would Jesus do such a thing!?

Let us read verse 16 together please, ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*** This is the very grace of God that He chooses broken people such as ourselves with a gift so wondrous (His Spirit) and calling so grand (to share the Gospel). Going back to an earlier point, we wonder aloud for what purpose has Jesus chosen me? What is the spiritual fruit Jesus wants me to bear? Jesus often reveals this when we least expect it. He called the Samaritan woman to be a missionary while she at the well avoiding other people. He called Peter and the disciples while they were in the middle of their day-jobs. He even called Paul while he was on his way to persecute the very people he would later share the Gospel to. And Paul confesses in 1 Corinthians 15:10 – “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” When Paul let Jesus prune him of his pride in himself, his accomplishments and his heritage, God transformed him into His humble and loving servant who bore great spiritual fruit that we still reap to this this very day. And Jesus has something similar in store for each and every one of us that we will come into being when we remain in Him.

In conclusion, we learned how Jesus calls on all believers to bear spiritual fruit by remaining in Him and His word. May the Lord enable us to see Him as the True Vine who enlivens us, sustains us and enables us to do so.