

**Text: John 15:1-8**

**Theme: How's the Connection?**

**Date: May 6, 2007 (Easter 5)**

**In the Name of Jesus, the True Vine, dear fellow branches in His vineyard,**

We are living at what some have called "the most connected time" in the history of the world. Think of the things that connect you to information and other people: Satellite TV with literally hundreds of channels, Cell phones with text messaging and e-mail options all held in the palm of your hand, Internet connections with websites like Facebook.com, MySpace.com, MSN instant messaging and countless chat rooms. With out a doubt modern technology has made it possible to stay connected to love ones and friends in this ages more than in any other time in the history of the world.

Yet despite all these connections we are also living at the most disconnected time in the history of the world. All those technological connections can keep people so isolated from one another that they don't have to personally interact and get personally connected to other people. Being isolated and disconnected from others is not the way most people foster relationships and show love and support for friends and loved ones. Despite the many blessings of modern technology, fostering a close relationship with others is not one of them. As emotionally created human beings we need to feel connected to others.

Our Lord Jesus knows of another connection that we also need - we need to be connected to him. This too is a connection that cannot be maintained with just a quick click here and a quick click there. A six-second "*Come Lord Jesus*" prayer before meals and a ten-second "*Now I lay me down to sleep*" prayer at bed time is not what Jesus had in mind when he said "*Remain in me.*" Likewise, an hour of time here and there for worship just isn't going to keep us securely connected to our Savior. In the words of our text Jesus describes our spiritual connection to him in agricultural terms. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Everything we are and have, everything we dream for and hope to accomplish must come from him - through the vine to us branches. So **HOW'S THE CONNECTION?** How's the connection to the true vine? That's the theme we would like to address on the basis of God's Word today. Do you sometimes feel all alone and isolated from Jesus? Does God seem far away from the challenges you face at work, in the family or marriage, or in your personal faith life? Could your home benefit from a closer connection to Jesus' love? How's the connection? Today God's Word teaches us what it means to be connected to Jesus, the vine, and what it means to be a branch connected to the vine.

### 1. Connected to Jesus

Think of a freshly cut flower. As nice as a bouquet of cut flowers look in a vase on the dinner room table, they have a problem. They are dying. A few days from now they won't look so nice, and after a few more days they will probably be tossed out. It's no mystery why - it is because they have been cut off from the living plant.

#### *Detached and Dying*

A freshly cut flower reminds us of how we begin this life. A beautiful baby is born, so full of life and promise and potential. But every baby is dying. You and I are dying because way back in the Garden of Eden a connection was lost. Adam and Eve had been created in God's image. They enjoyed a perfect connection to their heavenly Father. They were created to live and live and never die. But then they cut the connection with their sin and disobedience. And suddenly God felt so far away. Their sin had separated them from God and now they were dying. And so are we. We see the evidence of this in every stage of life as our sins, fears, and failures continue to earn for us our spiritual paycheck which when cashed will give us the wages of sin which is death, separation from God in hell. Long ago Job described the results of our disconnection from God when he wrote, "*Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away*" (14:1-2).

#### *Reattached to Live*

There is no way to reattach a cut flower to the plant. But God's loving power has performed such a miraculous reattachment to connect us to a source of never-ending life. We have been, by God's grace, connected to Christ Jesus, like a branch to the vine. God the Holy Spirit has grafted us into the vine, as we were baptized into Christ Jesus. No longer are we dead and dying in our sins, we are alive in Christ. Through our baptism, God's Word and the Holy Supper, the power of new life now flows to us and in us because we are a branch connected to the vine. In the words of our text Jesus says: **I AM THE TRUE VINE ... YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.** To God alone be the glory!

#### *Those no Connected*

Did you notice how Jesus calls himself the true vine? He is not a vine, as in one of many to believe in and follow. He is THE vine. He is the only real, authentic, trustworthy source of life for you and for me and for all. He is true God and true man who loved us and served us, who died for us and rose again. It seems, however, that some people have trouble believing that Jesus is the true vine, or if they do believe, he holds little value in their life.

- 1) Confirmants: 50% not in church weekly
- 2) Almost 50% of all members not in church each week
- 3) 275-300 communicant members have not received the Lord's Supper for several months; some even years

By the grace of God you and I know that Jesus is the true vine, the one who came from heaven and connects us to himself. He is our direct connection to God's heaven-sent love and patient forgiveness. In him we have life which means we can live and live forever. Life apart from him always amounts to nothing. Give thanks for your privilege to be a branch connected to the true vine, Jesus Christ.

## 2. Connected to Bear Fruit

Now that you are connected to Jesus, your heavenly Father, the gardener, has a plan for you. You are to bear fruit. He has designed you to be a productive branch in his vineyard. Jesus says: **I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. IF A MAN REMAINS IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT.** Jesus looks for faith to respond in action. He looks for lives of gratitude to him who lived, died, and lives again for us. Here is a partial list of the kind of fruit God looks for, *"The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22). The fruit of faith is Jesus' love shaping our actions, Jesus' truth guiding what we say, and our Savior's sacrifice permeating the way we think about our life and others. Our fruit we affect how we treat our spouse and our family. Our fruit will lead us to speak to family members and friends who are not now closely connected to Jesus. Our fruit will lead us to use our gifts of time, and talent and treasures to share Jesus through our ministry at Faith and throughout the world mission efforts of our synod.

### *Abundant Fruit*

Just as the nutrients flow through the vine to the branches and produce abundant fruit, so the love of God in Christ Jesus flows into our life and produce fruit of faith. These fruits of faith don't save us. God doesn't love us or give us heaven because of our works. No, works are the results of faith. The grapes don't make the branch alive, but a living branch produces grapes. And Jesus is looking for much fruit coming from our branches. No vineyard owner would be happy to find a few strays grapes here and there. He wants to see branches loaded down with thick bunches of lush grapes.

What kind of harvest is our branch producing? Does God hear us abundantly using his name in prayer and worship? Does he see the respect we have for him by the respect we have for his representatives in government and in our home? Does he see us honor him with our body because we know we have been bought at a price? Does he see our love for the souls of family and loved one who are presently disconnected from Jesus by the way we speak and encourage them to come to church? Does he see us using our earthly blessings to serve him and love others or are we hoarding God's blessing for selfish gain? What does the gardener see when he looks at our branches? Remember, he looks for much fruit, and he is graciously at work to increase the harvest.

### *Pruning*

Our heavenly Father, like a vinedresser, has a two-fold technique for us to bear abundant fruit. The first is pruning. Jesus says, **EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT BEARS FRUIT HE PRUNES SO IT WILL BE EVEN MORE FRUITFUL.** If you have ever seen a vineyard at pruning time, it is almost a shocking sight. The ground is covered with shoots and branches, some of them dry and dead, but many of them covered with leaves. And the vines look almost like they have been butchered; so much has been pruned away. The vinedresser cuts and prunes with only one goal in mind - he is after maximum harvest. Dead branches only get in the way - they have to go. Other living branches are only there for looks, they won't bear fruit, but they will draw away nutrients from the rest of the plant. Out comes the knife and they are gone too. The vinedresser works to produce results.

Our heavenly Father has to do some pruning work in our lives too. We have a sinful nature, which if left alone, will grow out of control. God cuts it back with his call to repentance. God's power prunes away sinful habits, cuts away favorite sins and strips away the easy excuses we use to justify those actions. At other times God may trim away things that seem so important to us. A good job, our health and physical abilities, an opportunity we had our heart set on - they can suddenly be gone. When things like that happen, it hurts and we wonder why. But our loving Father is the gardener. He knows what he is doing and in all things he works for the good of those who love him - and he has a reason, that we bear much fruit, all to give him glory.

### *Nutrients*

The second part of God's two-fold technique is to increase the supply of nutrients. The more nutrients, the more healthy and strong and productive the vine will be. The same is true of our faith. How do you get the nutrients your faith needs? Jesus says it like this - **REMAIN IN ME.** Eight times in these eight verses Jesus uses that word *"remain."* Remaining in Jesus' doesn't happen by wishful thinking or because you made a confirmation promise once upon a time. Remaining in Jesus happens as your surround yourself with his love for you in his word and sacraments. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Be in the word in your home and be here often for encouragement in the Word with your fellow branches, so you can support and encourage one another. Enjoy the blessings of your baptism by which you were connected to Christ the vine and raised in the new life of forgiveness. Receive the faith-strengthening, sin-forgiving body and blood of your Savior. As you remain in Christ, he will remain in you and you will bear much fruit. You have Jesus' word on that.

So how's the connection ? Some would have us believe that cell phones and the internet are the best ways to stay connected. Jesus says otherwise. Jesus say, *"Remain in Me."* Remain in my word! Remember, Jesus is the vine, and you are the branches. Stay connected to Jesus. Amen.