

Sermon Text: John 15:1-8
Date: May 11th, 13th, and 14th
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How's it feel to be a branch?
That is nourished.....and flourishing

Every person has basic needs. There is the need for food and water. We possess the need to feel safe and protected. We have to need to feel loved and appreciated. And we have the need to feel like we belong. And not only to feel like we belong, but that we mean something to the group. It's for those reasons that Jesus today reminds us that we are members of the most special group and invites you and me to be partakers of this invitation. So I am going to ask you a seemingly preposterous question, how does it feel to be a branch, that is nourished and flourishing?

The disciples were the ones gathered around Jesus that day. It was an intimate scene where Jesus could talk to them one on one. Jesus just finished telling Peter that he would deny him three times. Thomas was confused where Jesus was going, so Jesus said, ***"I am the way and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** **John 14:6** Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, the guarantee, the seal of faith. Jesus will go on to say, that the world will hate the disciples and the message of Christ crucified. And that's when they were to remember the words we consider today. "I am the vine, you are the branches." So you ask yourselves, "Do I really need this lesson today?" I am connected to Jesus the vine. I have faith in Jesus, what more do I need? Do you have doubts? Do you have fears? Do you face struggles and difficulties? Then listen again to what Jesus says to us today.

Remove a plant from its sources of nourishment and watch what happens. At first, everything looks fine, the plant is green and healthy and vibrant. But after a few days leaves turn brown, they begin to shrivel and fall off. Before you know it the whole plant begins to look brown and shriveled. When you remove yourself from the nourishment of God's Word, what happens? Just look at what happens. Maybe you never open your Bible, maybe you come to God's house occasionally or maybe you stop coming all together. Maybe you make sure you are connected to Jesus so that it is easier to give into those secret, lustful desires, so you remove yourself from Jesus.

At first everything seems fine. You don't notice any change. But soon you begin to notice things in your life. Obstacles come and instead of turning to Jesus for comfort and strength you turn to self pity, despair; you put all the pressure on your self to overcome these problems. You might even start turning to alcohol and other substances to cope with the stress. When you remove yourself from the nourishment that comes with staying connected to Jesus you begin to doubt that God is taking care of you. When you are no longer connected to the vine, how do you handle declines in health, health difficulties that attempt to shatter our foundation of faith built on Jesus and God's Word?

It becomes easier to throw in the towel for every obstacle. Maybe it's with a spouse, and because you are no longer connected to Jesus with the nourishment that you need you give up, you refuse to work through your problems because of that sinful, stubborn pride that tells me I don't need Jesus, I don't need to listen to God and his Word. Maybe it's with a child or a friend, since you aren't receiving the nourishment you

need from the cross, you have a quick, harsh, tongue instead of one that speaks out of sincere love. Maybe you feel like you can save so much time in your day by cutting out devotions, prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, or even in the back of your mind you look at the rising cost of fuel and think how much money can we save if we eliminate a few trips to church a month. What happens when you are no longer connected to the vine? You wither and perish.

Jesus tells us, ***“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.”*** **John 15:6** And that’s what we deserve. We do not deserve to be connected to the vine. We don’t deserve to receive the life giving nourishment of Jesus and his Word. We deserve to be cut off from the vine and thrown into the fire. Because of our sin, we do not deserve to be connected to the vine.

A Gardener looks for wonderful, strong branches with beautiful flowers from his vine. The best that we can produce on our own is rotten, withering, weak branches. There was only one solution for this gardener. He had to make a sacrifice. He sacrificed his own son to save those weak, withering, miserable branches. ***“You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.”*** **John 15:3** He revived us. Jesus purified us by the blood that poured from his hands and his feet. He energized us with the sight of the empty tomb. He sustains us by sitting at God’s right hand ruling, controlling all things for our good, so that we are healthy, vibrant branches nourished by the word of Life. What happens when you are nourished by the vine, you flourish!

But flourishing always isn’t easy. As Jesus said, ***“He [the gardener/God] 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.”*** **John 15:2** The gardener wants his vine to produce much fruit, so how is he going to do that? Well.... he has to prune it first. Sounds painful right? The gardener hurries to work on them, to trim and prune each one, removing the meaningless leaves. He aids them and watches over them every step of the way. God does the same thing with every believer on His vine. He does not let us be idle but sends us trials and troubles to exercise our faith. He allows the devil and the world hound us with pressures inside and out.

Because of that God purifies and trims the branches to make them stronger and better. All for the purpose that they bear much more fruit. Not only that we produce much more fruit, but that our faith may assert itself more and more because of those trials, difficulties, and pain. The result is.....we praise God more and more. Pray more often and sincerely from the heart. Trust in Him more surely. Spread the gospel more earnestly. Confess our faith more boldly. The result is fruit that is not only large and perfect but as Christ says here, abundant.

Flourish because what is holding you back. Jesus promises, ***“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*** **John 15:7** Do you have work before you, most certainly! What is the mission of Faith congregation? What job has God given us to do? What work does God give to you? Do you know a branch that has lost its connection to Jesus? Help them become reconnected to the vine. Encourage them to receive the nourishment Jesus alone gives to our souls. Parents, on this Mother’s Day weekend what a reminder to keep our children, our families firmly rooted in the Jesus, the true vine that sustains and nourishes our families for life eternal. Do you see opportunity to support God’s kingdom with any means

possible so that these branches will continue to grow and flourish, producing fruit that is beautiful and amazing. Work to strengthen our souls through regular attendance at the Lord's Supper where we receive the nourishment of Christ true body and blood and daily nutrition from God's Word.

And never forget, you are not a branch that is all by yourself. A vine needs more than just one branch. A single branch by itself can do very little. But all the branches working together, doing their part, strengthening and encouraging each other, accomplish extraordinary things. Together, rooted in Jesus, they form a marvelous sight.

Have you ever thought about being a branch? Imagine how that branch must feel as it produces beautiful fruits and flowers. Imagine how beautiful the vine looks when all its branches are healthy and budding. Imagine how beautiful the church is when all its branches, all its members, all believers are attached and nourished by the vine, Jesus Christ. Just imagine what that would be like. So how's it feel to be a branch connected to Jesus: absolutely wonderful! Amen.