

**John 15:5-8 “I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this: that you continue to bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s spring. Birds are chirping, branches are budding, things are coming to life again. And, when we look at the calendar, that confirms it. It’s May. It’s spring. I mean, not end of March Spring, but *really* Spring.

Jesus uses the budding, or fruit producing, branch as another indicator: Not of new life in connection with a new season, but *our* new life in our connection to him. He calls himself the vine — twice. First “the true vine,” and then “*the* Vine.” This is more than just a neat comparison. Jesus is the true vine because he rose from the dead. Literally, as a vine gives life to the branch, and all that it needs to produce its fruit, Jesus gives us life, the only life that truly matters. He makes that clear when he says, “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

In the early spring when you see all the branches in your yard, the little sticks, you go and pick them up and put them in a pile, either to be thrown out or burned up. There’s never any thought of trying to put the branches back on the tree. Without their connection to it, they are dead, they’re worthless.

That’s Jesus’ picture of anyone in this world that does not know him. And that was us, for a time, in this world. Born in sin, we were born apart from Christ. Though we were living and breathing we were not alive. The Bible describes our state as being *dead* in sin. Even our best acts were covered in it. Before everyone else, as a cute little baby, we looked pure and innocent. But before God we were anything but. From our heart’s first beat, in our sinful flesh we were steeped in sin and separated from God because of them. Our life, however nice and shiny and good and pleasing it was to those around us, before God it was a flatline of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. As a branch not connected to the vine cannot produce fruit, neither can a person who is not connected to Christ.

That means we could do nothing before God to earn his love or favor or whatever you want to call not being cast out of his presence forever. We couldn’t fix that problem. Because no matter how good we are, no matter how hard we try, sin still remains.

We could *do* nothing...and, we *had* nothing. Nothing of any value, nothing of any worth, nothing that would last beyond death. We were spiritually broke — not broken, just broke — we had nothing, no hope, no peace, no joy, no true happiness. We live, we sin, we die. And without a connection to that true life found only in Christ, the Vine, because of our sins our destiny was only eternal punishment. Like sticks left on the ground in spring, we were destined to be picked up and thrown away into the fires of hell. Apart from Jesus you could do nothing, nothing to better our existence, nothing to change our future.

But thankfully God could. In his infinite wisdom God fashioned a plan to save us. To make us perfect again and to make our sins go away. You know this plan. You’ve heard it many, many times. And yet it is so beyond our thinking, so beyond anything we would ever ask for that we must hear it again and again because if we don’t we will start to doubt, we will start to think, “No, that can’t be true. God wouldn’t do that for me.”

But he did. For sinful you and for sinful me, for this sinful world he sent the only one who could live a perfect life in our place, the only one who could die to pay for our sins. His one and only Son. Jesus left his heavenly home, was born into our world and lived under God’s law keeping it perfectly in every way. Jesus went to the cross carrying not the weight of his own sins, but the world’s, yours and mine. And as has been or focus this easter season, as we sang this morning, he rose. He rose in victory proving that the perfect life he lived and the innocent death he died was accepted by his heavenly father on behalf of our salvation.

The vine, the true vine was very much alive. And some 2000 years later you were connected to the living vine through water and the Word. Paul says in Galatians 3, “**As many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.**” As the pastor sprinkled the water on your head in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you were connected to Christ and all he did for you. Paul says in Romans 6, “**Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the**

**dead, we to would walk in a new life.”** A new life, connected to him, the vine, the true and living vine that gives life to us all. First before God, as his forgiven children, holy and perfect in his sight. No longer separated from him by our sins — they’ve been forgiven and removed. And then before each other, as we share this common faith in our Savior — showing Christ’s love to one another and forgiving one another as God has forgiven us — as we journey through this life to our eternal life in heaven.

Apart *from* Christ we have nothing. But, a part *of* Christ through faith in his life, death, and resurrection for us, we have all things. No longer spiritually broke, but rich! The forgiveness of sins, new life with God and each other, not punishment in hell but eternal life waiting. True and lasting peace, joy, happiness, hope. The only true and lasting treasures found in this world, we have right here — God’s Words to us, revealing to us the Gospel, the good news of Jesus and all he did for us.

Connected to the vine, we produce fruit. And as good Lutherans we’re quick to point out, “Yeah but, not all the time. I’m still a sinner, don’t forget!” Of course we are and our fruits aren’t what save us. But Jesus isn’t talking about that here. He’s taking about what branches attached to a vine naturally produce — fruit. And connected to Christ, that’s what we naturally produce. Fruits of our faith. Fruits of believing, fruits of trusting the promises of our God. Fruits of helping our neighbor and showing love to each other, living as God’s dearly loved children. Fruits of spreading God’s good news as we have opportunity. Bringing glory, not to ourselves, anymore than fruit brings glory to the branch or even the tree, but the one who planted it. That’s God. First and foremost our fruits aren’t for our benefit, certainly not for our salvation, but to bring glory to God.

That’s God’s will, that’s our goal. To God alone be the glory in all we think, say and do. Living our faith in line with that will, that goal, what do we ask for? Well, Jesus says, “**ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**”

Sounds like God has written us a blank check, doesn’t it? But there is a qualifier there. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you,” in other words if God’s will and ours, his goal and ours is one and the same, to produce fruit to bring him glory, to show him to the world as the God who has provided our salvation, that’s going to change how we look at that blank check. Thoughts of money and wealth fade away. Thoughts of

earthly power and success are meaningless. We set your sights higher, heavenward. Eternal life, forgiveness of sins, these impossible things that no man or woman can ever have on their own, but with Christ, as you ask for it, it will be done for you. Things like courage to share your faith, to live your faith, to die in faith, it’s yours. Wisdom to grow in faith and see God’s Word as the treasure it is, take it, Jesus says. What are the desires of your heart? Not your sinful, worldly, selfish heart, but the heart God brought to life at your baptism? The heart that wants only what is good, right, and pleasing to God, holy and pure?

And how should you go to God with those desires? Boldly, confidently, he will grant them. Go to him as Luther says, as a dear child asks his dear father. But more than that. Go to him as a dear child that has done all that his father has asked, perfectly. Go to him as a child with whom his father could not possibly be more pleased. In Christ, connected to Christ, that’s you.

Spring is here, all the signs say so. But as you drive around and see all the budding branches, be reminded of your new life because of your connection to Christ, that apart from him you can do nothing, but you are not apart from him, you are a part of him, the true and living vine, and have everything you need for today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen!