

The title of today's message is: **Staying Connected to the Vine**

Jesus said: **“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”**

Grace and peace to you from Good the father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Have you ever had one of those weeks where no matter what you do, nothing ever seems to go right?

Try as you may, you just can't seem to accomplish anything. Last week was one of those weeks for me.

Nothing went as I had planned. It seemed like every time I started something I ended up doing it over.

And then I picked up the lesson for today and knew why. “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.”

I was in such a rush to get my things done, that I had forgotten to stop and fuel up. I was going on my strength and not on His.

I was so fixed on my agendas that I hadn't taken the time to remind myself of His. I hadn't sought Him in prayer.

I hadn't remained tied to Him and His word. And I have a feeling, that's exactly where the disciples were at too.

There's no direct indication of it, but their recent past suggests that the likelihood was high.

After all, most of their agenda with Jesus wasn't being all that fulfilled. Jerusalem is probably the last place they thought Jesus should go.

That's where the Jewish authorities were. That's where there were some that would just as soon see Jesus die.

That's where Jesus, himself, had said that he would go to meet with rejection, cruel suffering, and death. Yes, He was heading for the cross.

He was talking about leaving this world behind. On top of that there were the strange lessons that He was teaching.

Lessons about greatness in being like a child or the value of humble service as He had shown by washing their feet that very night.

Look, Nothing happens by chance with our Lord. Some just think of Jesus walking along and suddenly coming up with a lesson of truth.

But all of this is happening within the context of real people with real concerns, real thoughts, real feelings, and real needs.

And Jesus knew what they needed most. He knew what they were lacking. He knew what needed to be filled.

More importantly He knew what was coming. He knew that His disciples were thinking of their own ideas and they were tied more closely to their own agendas.

That they weren't as close to Him as they needed to be. And He knew that they were about to be pruned as well.

Spiritually speaking Jesus is talking about the Heavenly Father trimming back His people; that is, clearing out the sinful.

The selfish, and self-reliant attitudes that are holding them back, correcting their ideas about what it meant for Jesus to be their Savior.

Strengthening their trust and reliance upon Him. It's a process that can be painful as we face the consequences of our actions.

Especially as we're brought to admit how we've been wrong, as we let go of our own plans and lives and give them into His hands.

It would be for the disciples. Their pruning would come by way of a friend lost and crucified. Their cleansing would come at the spilling of His blood.

Their correction and strengthening of faith would grow out of an event that would lead them to first see how vulnerable and weak they were.

The image of being cut and the imagined pain of a bleeding wound are not unwarranted. These things can cause pain. They do cause pain.

And Jesus knew that that in the face of such a pruning some come to the conclusion that God has somehow struck them down and left them.

He knew that some see troubles as a sign that somehow God doesn't love them at all when it's quite the opposite that is true.

For out of this pruning His disciples would come to realize just how dependent they were on Jesus' love, and how strong they could be when they lived by Christ and His Spirit.

When such a pruning comes, and it does to all of us, it's not a time to curse God and walk away from Him in disgust as Job's wife suggested to him.

It's a time to abide in Him who is the vine all the more. It's a time to look for what's been lacking, for where we've been wasting our life on foolish, unproductive things.

It's a time to look with expectant hearts to the fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control".

Such a pruning is the only cutting off that the Father really does. I know it says that he cuts out the fruitless branches, but they were dead already.

And all of this begs the question. "How have you and I been doing when it comes to fruit?"

How much self-control have been showing when we indulge ourselves at the expense of our responsibilities to our families and our church?

How faithful have we been to our Lord and His church when our worship has been limited to a couple of Sundays a month?

How much kindness and gentleness have we displayed when we can't even find 8 people who are willing to serve a grieving family at funeral luncheon?

How much peace are we showing when we let worry over tomorrow keep us from fulfilling our responsibilities today?

How much patience and love are flowing from our lives when we continue to hold a grudge and plot how we're going to get even?

And if you're convicted after all of this like I am, and there's not a one of us here today who shouldn't be.

If you're feeling a bit fruitless, then ask yourself one last question, "Why? How can this be?"

I think we know. We know the place to which our Lord and His Word has been relegated in our lives.

We know when the Portals of Prayer and a daily reading of the word are replaced by the newspaper and a cup of coffee.

We know when we're confronted with the stark truth today, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."

But there's a promise here too, for that's why Jesus gave it. What was lacking in the disciples He wanted to fill.

What was weak he wanted to strengthen. What was cut off from Him He was wanting to reconnect.

If you've walked away, if you've drifted apart, if you find yourself cut off from the vine today, there's still a re-grafting into the vine by God's grace.

The same grace that grafted you in, in the first place, that grafted us all into the vine, would return you to Him.

For none of us is a branch by our own accord. We are cleansed by His Word, sealed in His own blood that He shed for our forgiveness.

Blood that he poured out to restore us, blood that he would feed us with today in the Sacrament that we might be filled with more life than we could ever imagine.

Yes, our Lord would cut us back today. His word would sting a bit as it cuts away at where we've gone.

But to what end? It's that our sins might be left behind, that we might be cut free from the excuses that have been holding us back.

That we might be poured anew into that which is most abundant, most profitable for fruitful living with our Lord.

It's that we might drink more deeply of His Word; root ourselves more deeply into Him, who will always be there, never to leave us behind.

In 1989 an earthquake flattened Armenia, killing 30,000 people in less than 4 minutes.

After the tremors stopped a father ran to the elementary school where his son attended.

The building was little more than a pile of rubble, but he remembered what he had promised his son.

"No matter what happens, I'll always be there for you" and driven by that promise he found the area closest to his son's room and began pulling rocks away.

Other parents came and sobbingly said, "It's too late. They're all dead. But the father refused to give up.

For 8 hours, 16 hours, 36 hours he dug. His hands were raw and his energy gone, but he refused to quit.

And finally, as he pulled back a large boulder, he heard his son's cry, "Dad, it's me."

The boy was with a small group of children who were alive, trapped beneath the rubble.

He had told the others that his dad was going to save him because he had promised to always be there and that when he saved him, he would save them too.

My hope, my prayer is that we see our Lord doing just the same today. When we see the world shaking and crumbling out from beneath our feet

We can stand on His love and promises when things have fallen apart all around us, we can see him clearing away the mess.

Pulling out what's been holding us back, removing what's been weighing us down and opening the way to new found life in Him.

My prayer is that abiding in Him and in His Words of hope we can hold out that assuring promise to the circle of friends and neighbors.

And to the people that He has seen for us to meet; and that drawing our strength from Him we find our lives bearing the kind of fruit that would last an eternity.

My hope is that we leave here again today patient and full of joy, confident of His love, resting in the fruit of His peace until that last and triumphant day.

When we all will look at our heavenly Father in the eye and say, "Dad, it's me. I knew you would come."

Amen!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.