

"To Be a Good Branch"

May 2, 2021

1 John 4: 7 – 21

John 15: 1-8

Rev. L. Bryan McClain

Gardening season is here, that time to get your vegetables and flowers that you want for the summer season and plant them in the ground or pots or whatever you choose to grow them in. Stephanie saw some raised bedding frames that she liked, and so we purchased a couple of those to try and raise some tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and other things so that the voles won't eat the roots and things.

But what are the three essential things you need to grow a plant? You need sun, water, and perhaps the most important thing is you need dirt, that which the plant itself is planted or rooted in. If it is not rooted in the ground, no matter how much water or sun it gets, it will not help it.

The same is true with a branch coming off of the main vine. If a branch is not attached to the main vine, it will not produce anything.

The problem, however, is when a plant is rooted into the soil, or a branch is attached to a vine, and it still does not produce what it is supposed to produce. Maybe then there is a problem with the amount of water or sun, either too much or too little. Or maybe there are not enough nutrients in the soil.

As for a branch that either does not produce or stops producing, it may indicate an entirely different problem altogether. But no matter what, if it is not producing the fruit of the main vine, it does not look like the main branch. It uses up energy that could go to other branches, making the whole vine weaker and less productive overall. Thus, the need to prune the dead branches.

The idea here is that the branch, if it abides in or lives in the vine, getting what it needs from its primary source should produce the fruit of the said vine. The same is true of any plant that is rooted in the ground. It gets what it needs from the environment that surrounds it.

Knowing that we have many voles and moles in our yard at the parsonage, Stephanie realized that our plants' environment tried to grow in in past years was not the greatest. Hence, she had the idea to change the environment just a little, to plant them in a raised bed so that what is planted has a better chance to thrive and produce the fruit it is intended to produce. So, we will see how that works this year.

But the same is true for us as Christians. If we are not producing the character of being a

Christian in our daily lives, then there is a problem. For whatever reason, we are not connected to the vine-like we should be. It could be that we are not getting enough nutrients, such as the care and nurturing that we get from small groups, or maybe we are not reading and trying to understand the scriptures. Or perhaps we are not getting to the worship that keeps us grounded and rooted in not just the scriptures but also the fellowship and our faith disciplines, the roots of our faith.

Like a plant that is not rooted in the soil, or a branch that is cut off from the main vine, if we are not rooted or connected, our soul begins to wither, dry up, and eventually, it dies.

Someone recently said to me that they were worried that once we come out of this pandemic, people will not return to church. And while I agree that that is undoubtedly a concern, one which we have seen even before the pandemic hit, I don't know that I believe that will actually happen. In fact, we just may see the opposite.

Just like what happened after 911, when there was a surge of church attendance for about a year or so, I think coming out of this pandemic will produce an opportunity for people to come seeking to be rooted into the love of God. They have been missing something. I know I have. That is, there will be people looking for something deeper and richer, and more meaningful for their lives. They will be looking for a connection to a higher power. And we, the church, should be in a position to offer it. No matter who they are or where they came from.

But how long their search may last will depend on the ground which they choose to root themselves into. We, the church, are the ground which people will come to and either choose to root themselves into or not. And even when they do, we, as the surrounding environment, must be rooted ourselves in the good news of Jesus Christ. If we are not, then anyone that attaches themselves to us will wind up withering away. For us to be a productive church, producing the fruit, we as the church of Jesus Christ must be rooted in his life and his love.

And by church, I mean each one of us, digging into scripture, growing in our own personal lives abiding in his Spirit. God is love, and that is what we are called on to reflect in our way of life. Love of God, love of neighbor, no matter who they are, love for one another, and yes, love of self, but not over and above all else.

We are coming out of this pandemic slowly but surely. Just as we are now able to sing a little in our services and as we are now beginning to have some fellowship opportunities, and as I hope that we can begin to resume bible studies and Sunday School, we can put all of the tools in place that we need to grow, all of the supplies to nourish our spirits, but unless each of us chooses to put ourselves fully into the environment that God is giving us, it will do us no good either as individuals or as this body of Christ. Ultimately it will destroy the vine, the church. Because no matter what is here, if people are not connected, not rooted, not taking in the nutrients, it will not survive.

In order to grow well, in order to produce good fruit, we have to tend to the whole plant, both ourselves and one another, with the love, care, and Spirit of our Lord and Savior, who is our main vine.

Let us remember that this morning as we prepare to drink from the vine and eat of his bread. And let us all this morning rededicate ourselves to be a good branch because we abide in a strong vine and grow in the good soil of Jesus Christ.