

Jesus, The True Vine

Jn 15:1-17

Key Verse 15:5

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Personal Introduction / Welcome

Good morning everyone. It's been almost 2 years since the last time I delivered a message here. And at that time, we had just had our third child, Lincoln. As I mentioned, he became the 5th Toh in our home, officially making us a “Foot.” [\[Family photo\]](#) We have been a happy and busy family the past two years.

A little about myself: After 12 years at Chicago Public School, I retired from teaching math and am now on staff here serving the youth ministry, while running a business with my brother. I am a born and raised Chicago UBF kid. Happily married to my best friend, Anna.

I am also a born and raised Chicago **city** kid. Which makes it a little difficult for me to speak on vines and branches because the only things I'm really good at growing are unwanted weeds. The first time I ever mowed a lawn was at the age of 30 because the houses in the neighborhood I grew up in around UIC were so close together, literally there was about 2 feet between my building and the building next door. No backyards. And even the “grass” I'm now cutting at my house is more weeds than grass. I always tell Anna, “I've gotta mow our weeds.”

But I do have one success story with fruit. 4 years ago at the hallelujah light festival [\[show photo\]](#) my wife put together a homemade costume to dress my first son up as branches, and my daughter as fruit. That is our one and only success story when it comes to gardening.

Jesus, The True Vine

I'm humbled with this privilege to stand up here today to share God's word with you. It is a passage that has challenged me personally in many ways. And I hope you can all be blessed through it. Can I pray before we begin?

Introduction

Many of us gather here today because we believe in God as our Father, Jesus as our Savior, and the Holy Spirit as our guide. And it's ok if you're here and you're not sure about those things, because they are in fact big statements of faith. So we're happy you're here to ponder them.

But after coming to faith, the next thing is learning how to live our lives. And this is a lot harder than it sounds. Because let's be honest, people are losing their trust and confidence in the Church and in Christians. And we can't really blame them in the light of church leader's blind allegiance to political parties and the moral failures of prominent Christian leaders. It's tough because shouldn't Christians be the model of God's love and truth? Shouldn't our lives be a living witness and testimony of our faith? It's the "How then shall we live?" question.

Today we are in the middle of a 3 week, John's gospel "I am" series. Covering three of the seven big, bold statements about who Jesus is. Last week we thought about Jesus, the Bread of Life. When we feed on Jesus, our souls are fully satisfied. Jim Rabchuk challenged us to understand what Jesus says, "The work of God is this: to believe the one he has sent." (Jn 6:29)

In today's passage, Jesus is hours away from his death. He is having an intimate conversation with his closest friends, the twelve disciples. Through this conversation Jesus paints a picture of a vine with branches that bear fruit. Jesus is the vine, we are branches, and God is the gardener. There is this beautiful and interconnected relationship in this analogy that God desires for us to realize. Through this analogy we are charged to remain in Jesus and see that our main purpose is to bear fruit. Let's take some time this morning to ponder who Jesus is

Jesus, The True Vine

and who we are in the context of this vital relationship between the vine and the branches.

I. The Relationship (1-5)

Let's read verses 1 and 2 together. **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He 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."**

Jesus the Vine.

This passage starts with a bold statement of Jesus. He is The. True. Vine. Jesus is not one of many vines. But the one and only. And we are just branches. Why is Jesus suddenly talking about vines? In the context of this chapter, Jesus and his disciples have left the Upper Room where they shared the first communion (Jn 13) and are going to the garden of Gethsemane. On the way, they would have passed through grape vineyards that surrounded Jerusalem. Jesus knows their world is about to be flipped upside down with his impending death, and they will be facing many trials and persecution. So with vines all around them he sought to teach them about the kind of relationship they are going to need to have with him while he's gone. And it starts with acknowledging that he is the true vine. The source of life.

We the Branches.

Let's read verse 4. **"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."** In this analogy, the vine provides the nutrients for each branch to bear fruit. A branch, detached from the vine, cannot bear fruit (4). So while the branches bear the fruit, it does so only when it is connected and well nourished by the vine. We receive within ourselves what is needed to produce the

Jesus, The True Vine

fruit God desires, only when we are attached to the true Vine Jesus. We don't have to struggle, agonize, or try really really hard to produce fruit by ourselves. Rather, the fruit will be brought about naturally by the Vine who is Jesus. So long as we stay in the vine, by "remaining in Jesus" and let His life flow through us, we will bear fruit.

(Why is the vine and branch relationship a good analogy?)

God the Gardener.

As verse 1 says, God is the gardener. As the Gardener is responsible to see that the purpose of the Vine is fulfilled. This kind of gardening is a serious art that I know little to nothing about. Anna and I have tried to grow many things, and have failed miserably. But for a brief period of time we lived in the same building as Missionary Mark and Blessing Lee. M. Mark Lee has so many talents. One of them is gardening. The one spring I lived in his building he transformed a very ordinary city backyard into a plentiful garden. He did so through much attention to detail and countless hours of cultivating and caring for the plants.

In the same way, God is the most excellent gardener who deeply desires for it to be fruitful. For this end our passage tells us that God cuts off branches that don't bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit (2). Cutting off and pruning of branches that aren't bearing fruit, allows for the branches that are bearing fruit to be even more fruitful.

So what instrument does God use to prune the branches? The answer is in verse 3. Let's read that together, **"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."** The greek word for "clean" here, is actually the same word for "prune." The disciples, by listening to Jesus' words, have been pruned. And just like gardening, this process is repeated again and again.

Jesus, The True Vine

Perhaps you are going through a “**pruning**” season at this moment. God may be using a sharp knife of circumstance to cut off what’s hindering the fullest, most fruitful “you.” Old habits, and attitudes are confronted through life events with the Word of God that corrects and cleanses “the branches” in order that we can bear more fruit. The Word of God is a cleansing agent. It condemns sin, inspires holiness, and therefore promotes growth in us. God continually cleans and prunes his disciples through his Holy Words. This can be painful and difficult. But pruning is God’s love for us.

Sometimes there is a struggle because we don’t want to be branches. Remember Satan’s original deception, “You will be like God.” (Gen 3:5) Deep down, we want to be vines! We don’t want to depend on Jesus. We want to do our own thing and bear our own fruit. That’s why Jesus repeats this truth in verse 5. Let’s read verse 5 together. **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing.”**

This verse has the two most repeated words in this passage. **“Remain”** is repeated 11 times in the first 10 verses. **“Bear fruit”** appears 8 times. But “bearing fruit” does not appear as a command. Fruit is more like a consequence, or a natural result, of remaining in Christ. **Fruit is a guaranteed result of remaining in Jesus. Not something we actually do.**

So that leaves us with two questions to ponder. What is the fruit? And how can we remain in Jesus?

II. The Fruit: Blessings of remaining in Jesus.

There’s a lot we can say about the fruit God desires for us to have. But in our passage this morning Jesus gives us four blessings, or fruits, of remaining in Jesus.

Jesus, The True Vine

1. Answered prayer (7,16)

Look at verse 7. **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** This is one of the first signs Jesus mentions of a fruitful life. We should not misunderstand this to say, “ask whatever you want.” It’s an “If-then” statement. When his words remain in us, our desires are transformed to do his will. If we truly love Him and put Him first, then we can ask what we will, and it will be done. The prayers that are answered are the prayers that grow out of a relationship of an obedient heart and leaves the process and timing to God. What an assurance and peace we have to be able to ask God boldly whatever we wish, as we abide in him.

2. God glorified (8)

Look at verse 8. **“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** When God’s people remain in Jesus, their life brings glory to God. Bearing fruit is not about feeling good about ourselves or being successful. Rather the fruit of a life remaining in Jesus is about living out our life purpose which is to glorify God. God is glorified not only by our praise and worship but by the fruit that we bear. The person we are becoming. It is a tremendous blessing to think that sinful broken people like ourselves, get to display the wonders and power and goodness and glory of the Gardener.

3. Complete Joy (11)

Let’s read verse 11 together. **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”** Wow, this is quite a blessing. As we remain in Jesus, we receive **his** joy in us and our joy is made complete. Notice that it’s **Jesus’** joy in us that makes our joy fuller and fuller to the brim. **Our joy** doesn’t come from the fruit, but from Christ. This God given joy strengthens us to

Jesus, The True Vine

get through tough times. Since this joy is not based on circumstance. It is not based on our accomplishments. It comes from our true vine Jesus. It is a supernaturally given blessing from the Lord: a deep and full joy that satisfies our soul no matter what we are going through.

4. Friendship (15)

The fourth and final fruit Jesus mentions is friendship with Him. There are many things that make someone a friend, but one thing about a good friend is that they are allowed into your inner thoughts and life. You trust them and are vulnerable with them. Jesus calls us his friend because he shares what he learns from God with us. Let's read verse 15 together. **“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”** This is my favorite blessing of remaining in Christ. Friendship with Him.

These are only 4 of many other fruits we bear as branches that remain in Jesus. Last week Jim Rabchuk mentioned that in view of world mission, the disciples God raises through us is also our fruit. Galatians 5:22-23 teach us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. What fruit is God bearing in your life right now? How is your prayer life? How deep is your joy? How intimate is your friendship with Christ? I pray that Jesus may bear such beautiful blessings and fruit in your life as you remain in him.

III. How can we remain?

So then we are left with one more question. How do we remain in Jesus? Look at verses 4 and 5. Jesus asks us to remain in him. In other translations it says **“abide.”** But how can we remain, or abide, in a person? It's kind of a weird thing

Jesus, The True Vine

to ask, isn't it? While we cannot remain in any other person, we can remain in Christ as Christ remains in us. In our passage we find 4 ways to remain in Jesus.

1. He also remains in us (4,5)

The first thing to acknowledge about remaining in Jesus is that we are not left to do this on our own. Verse 4 says, **“Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”** Jesus is actively seeking to commune with us and abide in us. On our own we'd fail, no doubt. He doesn't put the full responsibility of remaining in Jesus solely on his disciples. We don't have to feel alone in this endeavor. Our life is practically and spiritually connected to Jesus the True Vine.

2. Hold onto Jesus' Word (7)

Verse 7 says, **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you...”** Verse 2 told us that Jesus' disciples were already cleaned because of his word. God's word to us through the Bible is what we have to nourish our souls. And just as we should eat a healthy amount of food each day to sustain our bodies, we need a healthy amount of God's word to care for our soul each and every day. When we develop a love and taste for the word of God, we can remain in Jesus by having his words in us. There are many ways to do this. We can read and study the Bible. We can memorize verses. We can do daily devotions. In UBF we have this beautiful practice of writing reflections. No matter how we do so, God's word is what nourishes our soul and allows us to remain in Jesus. Do you have one word of God, a verse, you are holding on to now?

3. Know that you are dearly loved (9)

The third way to remain in Jesus is to know that you are dearly loved. Let's read verse 9, **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”** Of the 11 times Jesus says remain, 3 times he says, **“remain in my**

Jesus, The True Vine

love.” (9,10) Sometimes we can feel completely unlovable, like we can't even love ourselves. But Jesus loves us no matter what. Jesus loves us the same way God loves his Son. The Father loved Jesus with a love that endures forever. With a love that is unchanging, intimate, and unconditional. Because of such love, Jesus loved his disciples by teaching them, serving them, and feeding them. Ultimately he loved them by dying on the cross for them. When he calls us his friends (15), he first reminds us that **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”** (14) He bore our sin and our shame, our shortcomings and all that is ugly and dirty inside of us. He took all that to the cross, shedding his blood in our place. But then God raised him from the dead. This is what Jesus did out of his love for us, to remain in us. This is how he became our True Vine. He loved us to the cross. Do you know that you are dearly loved by Jesus?

4. Keep Jesus' commands (10) to love each other

Finally Jesus says in verse 10, **“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.”** When we love Jesus, we keep his commands, and in this way we remain in his love. So what are his commands? Verse 11 says. **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** Repeated in verse 17. **“This is my command: Love each other.”** There are other commands of Jesus in the Bible, but Jesus only repeats one of them, twice here. With his departure in mind, he knew his disciples were going to need to be united in love for one another. Love is the command we can start to obey in remaining in Jesus.

Growing up in this church, I have been blown away by the way this church loves. It is beautiful how many people here, when inviting students to Bible study, actually invite them into their lives to share everything. People in this church open up their home. They sacrifice time, and money, and food for others in this community. But loving our co-workers can be a very challenging task at times.

Jesus, The True Vine

Loving each other is not easy. We've made a lot of advances as a human race in technology, healthcare, agriculture. But one area we have a lot of progress to make is in loving one another. The news is so hard to watch because it is filled with stories of shootings and death. My facebook page was hard to read this week with my friends sharing their assault stories. Globally there is so much unrest in many parts of the world. It is all so sad, because all these things could be solved if we can figure out how to love one another.

I want to challenge all of us, myself included, to be exemplary in our love for others. To respect another human beings body as their own. To fight the injustices we see as a result of racism and prejudice. To defend the weak and the bullied. To befriend our neighbors who might be different than us.

Jesus' challenge in these verses is to a deeply committed love that also starts right here in this room. To love our brothers and sisters in Christ right here. (Not easy, all bringing hurts and pain) To love our pastors and pray for them. The love we are called to is not just random acts of kindness, but a love that is ready to sacrifice our lives for each other. A love that Christ showed us. A love that can forgive each other. Let's be slow to speak and quick to listen. Slow to tell others what they should do, and quick to empathize and understand. Let's remain in Jesus by doing what he commands, to love each other.

Life, like gardening, is actually more of a messy and organic process. Vines face scorching sun, and droughts, and rough winds. Fruit comes from the earth, the mud, and isn't always picture perfect. There's even a great produce delivery service online called ["Imperfect"](#) that seeks to sell people "ugly fruit." They go to great effort to convince people that imperfect looking fruit is just as good if not better tasting to eat because it is natural.

In the same way, this remaining in Jesus life, is not an assembly line that produces factory perfect products as we think it should be. The remaining in Jesus

Jesus, The True Vine

may look different for different people, at different times. If you are in a season of despair, or feel like you are failing, remaining in Jesus might mean to trust him and his guidance. If you are burdened and life is difficult to bear right now, remaining in Jesus might mean to lean on him to give you strength to endure. If life has you tired and burned out, remaining in Jesus might mean you will turn to him to find rest for your soul. If you are wrestling with unbelief and doubt, remaining in Jesus might mean you will trust him at his word, even when it doesn't seem to make sense. In the end, remaining in Jesus is holding on to the gospel that says: He has done it all. He is good enough. He is all I need. He paid the price. He will carry me through.

Remember my one and only gardening success story: my adorable kids. They are my pride and joy. On instagram, we post the prettiest and picture perfect images of our family. And everything seems so wonderful and charming, ALL the time. But every other parent knows the reality. The reality of parenting is that our children are the result of 3 grueling pregnancies, sleepless nights, sacrifices, pain and toil. Remaining in Jesus is kind of the same. We can look at each other's social media pages and think, "Man, everyone else is doing so much better than I am." "What is wrong with me?" "I am such a failure." But the reality of a life of faith is it will be messy, it will be tough. God's pruning hurts! It will take pain and sacrifice. But we have Jesus who is working even harder to make this relationship work. And we have hope that it will be worth it all. If our not so perfect parenting can produce fruit in our children, how much more can our heavenly Gardener and our True Vine Jesus, bear fruit in us!

Personal Reflection

I wish I could stand up here and tell you that I've been doing a good job with remaining in Christ. But to be honest, I have been feeling tired and stretched thin. (this week, last night has been tough) God called me into serving HBF ministry when I was 20 years old, and I have given my life to serve it for 15 years now. I

Jesus, The True Vine

met my best friend and beautiful wife serving HBF ministry and have done so together with her for 11 years this Saturday. But raising our three children, stewarding the ministry together, and running our business has us feeling like our plates are so full, like we're barely surviving. On the surface it looks like we're bearing some fruit. Business is growing slow and steady. James and Annabelle got into gifted school. Ministry has us making deep relationships with students. The thing is, Anna and I are doers, we are go getters. So our default is to be very active, to fill our schedule with many activities. We can plan many events and have many Bible studies, and invite many people to our home, which on the surface looks like "fruit." But this passage this week was refreshing to my soul, reminding me of what my activity should be. You see, bearing fruit is not the command in this passage. Remaining in Jesus is. The fruit is the result. But so often I get this flipped. I live as if the command is to bear fruit, because I genuinely want to bear much fruit for God, and then I hope that all my efforts will result in remaining in Jesus. I focus on the fruit, and not the remaining. I lose sight of Christ and who this is all for. This is actually very timely for Anna and I. It is my prayer for Anna and myself to get this right. That the focus of our marriage and our lives of faith will be to abide in Christ, and allow **Him** to bear the fruit he desires through our lives.

Conclusion

The fruit bearing that Jesus wants for us is a lifelong process and a lifelong struggle. And unfortunately, it goes against our worldly, carnal desires. We want something quick. We want something instagram perfect. Immediate gratification. But let's hold on to the true vine Jesus. Jesus has done it all. Let's let go of the tight fist we have on our lives trying to bear a bunch of fruit through our own efforts. Instead let's come into the freedom of God's grace through Jesus who sustains us as a vine sustains the branches. Let's remain in Jesus as of first importance. May God be glorified and take deep joy in us as we bear much fruit, inside and out.