

## **Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday. 2/11/24**

### **First Lesson Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-14**

7 Wherefore I prayed, and understanding was given me: I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.

8 I preferred her before sceptres and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her.

9 Neither compared I unto her any precious stone, because all gold in respect of her is as a little sand, and silver shall be counted as clay before her.

10 I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light: for the light that cometh from her never goeth out.

11 All good things together came to me with her, and innumerable riches in her hands.

12 And I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom goeth before them: and I knew not that she was the mother of them.

13 I learned diligently and do communicate her liberally: I do not hide her riches.

14 For she is a treasure unto men that never faileth: which they that use become the friends of God, being commended for the gifts that come from learning.

## **Second Lesson: John 15:1-17**

**1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.**

**2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.**

**3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.**

**4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**

**5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.**

**6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**

**7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.**

**8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.**

**9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.**

**10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.**

**11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.**

**12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.**

**13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

**14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.**

**15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.**

**16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.**

**17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**

## **Introduction**

Last fall I was blessed to be able to spend several weeks in the beautiful country of Ireland. It is truly an amazing place with wonderful people and every shade of green you can imagine. One of the afternoons we stopped along a hill of green pastures and grazing sheep. I was on a bus tour, and they had arranged for us to see a demonstration of how the local farmers use sheep dogs to tend to their flocks.

The farmer took us to a huge back field where there were hundreds of sheep scattered about and randomly dispersed in all corners. Out trotted three beautiful border collies who ran up to face the sheep and then hunkered down on the grass. The farmer came out and explained that he communicates with the dogs through a series of whistles and went on to demonstrate. The first blast was long, and it prompted the dogs to get up and race toward the sheep, each stopping at a different place along a horizontal line, alert and ready to spring into action. The next whistle was two short blasts which prompted the dogs to each race toward the sheep from different angles, and together they brought them in and clustered them in the middle in a tight bunch. The farmer then blasted another combination of whistle notes and one of the dogs came around

to the back, while the other two patrolled the sides, slowly moving the herd toward the farmer. If any of the sheep started to leave the group, the dog would quickly herd them back. The farmer had the ability to move them left or right and forward based on the tone of his whistle.

It was an amazing sight to see. I couldn't help thinking about how these dogs work together with the farmer to produce the fruits of wool and meat. The dogs need the farmer to give them direction, train them, feed them, and keep them safe. By themselves, the dogs would be a chaotic mess, looking out for their own survival, and unable to do the tasks they do. The farmer, through his caring, love and patience helps the dogs to be fruitful and productive.

Someone in the audience asked if any of the dogs had ever failed to learn their work. The farmer shared the story of a young dog who they brought in as a puppy and put through the rigorous training to be a sheep dog. Unfortunately, while he heard the commands of the farmer, the dog was unable to be obedient and couldn't focus on the job at hand. He would want to do his own thing and would end up scattering half the sheep. They ended up giving him to a neighbor to raise as a pet. He was unable to heed the commands of the farmer, and as a result was unable to produce what the farmer needed, so he needed to be removed from the process.

## **Body**

**John 15:1-9 (Jesus compares the relationship with his followers as like the vine and the branch. The branch needs the vine to produce fruit, much like we need Jesus to produce our earthly fruits.)**

In today's Second Lesson, from the Gospel according to St. John:

*“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

In this passage our Lord Jesus claims us as His own. He commands us to continue to faithfully follow His Word, and he cautions us against failure to follow Him. He draws the comparison between Him and those who follow Christ and the relationship between the fruit and the vine. Remember from Paul's letter to the Galatians what the Spirit of God gives us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). When we abide in Christ, we see He is the source of our spiritual nourishment, and with it will spring the fruit of spiritual gifts. The purpose of spiritual gifts is that the body of Christ will be edified (see Eph 4:12). When a disciple discovers, develops, and uses his or her gifts, the body of Christ grows stronger.

Abide in, or in other words, always faithfully remain in the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Abiding in Jesus means abiding in his love.

*“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.”*

“Abide in me” is replaced by “Abide in my love,” and this shows more specifically what we receive when we are united to the vine, namely, the sap of divine love. As we love and live in Jesus Christ, He lives in us. We say this every Sunday that we share in Holy Communion: *“that He may dwell in us, and we in Him.”*

When we allow Jesus Christ to live in us, to guide us, teach us, and inspire us, then we act in accordance with His will. We truly then allow God to show Himself through us. He guides us to acts of kindness, of charity, of Christian love. His Word then shows through our lives and our actions to become a beacon to the world.

It is important to note that we cannot do this on our own:

*“...as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”*

If Jesus Christ is the vine, and we His branches, then the Father is the vintner. The wise vintner knows that pruning back the vine produces

more fruit. He or she will cut off the superficial, sap-draining branches for all the life-giving sap to flow to those branches that have the greatest potential to bear fruit. Jesus promised that the Father (the vintner) will prune us in order that we may bear more fruit. He also told us the tool He uses to prune us are His words found in Holy Scripture.

As we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the words of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will use them to cut us with conviction (Heb 4:12). As we agree with God about our sins and repent of them, He is faithful to cleanse, or prune, all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This cleansing allows us to experience more of Jesus flowing through our lives and, as a result, see more fruit produced.

Unfortunately, some branches are not connected to the vine and as a result they do not produce. The branches, while they are part of and abide in the vine, can flourish, and prosper and be fruitful. Of themselves alone, they are weak and cannot live. Remember Jesus said, “without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) These unconnected branches are like parasites on a plant, shoots which grow, and use up the resources of the vine, and yet do not produce fruit. These non-productive branches will be removed by the vintner. They are not doing their duty to the vine.

Sadly, some who seem a part of the vine of Christ do not produce. They will be pruned as well. Christians must be fruitful. They must be productive. They must “bear good fruit.”

From a vine, we expect grapes. From a Christian we, and God, expect a Christian life. The Christian is expected to have a Christian disposition, Christian devotions, and Christian values. A Christian honors God, professes his or her faith, and produces the fruit of doing good works.

As the Twelfth Article of Religion reminds us:

“Good Works ... are the fruits of Faith and follow after Justification.... They are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ and do spring out

necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”

*“He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit,”* says Jesus.

This makes sense that with God we can produce much fruit. With the power, the strength, and the grace of Jesus Christ directing our life, we can show forth the grace received from Christ. We can use the gift of our own free will to allow our Lord, who lives in us, to live and love through us.

First, even attempting to do good without the indwelling of Jesus Christ is futile. Man, on his own, can do nothing that is spiritually good. Nothing good happens without Jesus Christ and His Spirit, His grace and His presence.

If the branch produces no good fruit, then it is cut off:

*“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch,”* Jesus says.

We know that there is a judgment at the end of our life. We know that we will give account for all we have done and left undone. The unproductive branches of the vine are cut off and gathered, then cast into the fire; they are good for nothing else.

But for the fruitful servant, there is a much different fate:

*“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”*

By the grace of God, the eternal life, unending joy, and the perfect peace that flows from the Vine is freely given to those who abide in Him and bear much fruit.

*“Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.”*

When Christians abide in Christ, live in His word, God is glorified. This is why Jesus came to live among us. He came to teach us, to lead us, to save us. When we show forth the results of living in Jesus, and His living in us, then we glorify Him. We can then focus on the task of “staying faithful and producing what God wishes us to produce.” We bear the fruits of doctrine, of grace and good works, and the origin of this good fruit is shown to be God, working through His people.

### **Action**

*“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.”*

We are almost to the season of Lent, a time for reflection and discernment. We need to be examining ourselves and our lives and asking if we are producing fruit or are we not. Before every action, especially those that cause you to pause and think, ask yourself. “Do I glorify God by doing this?” Am I being selfish? Am I being kind to others? Am I committing sin or not living up to my potential? Am I loving God with all my heart, soul and mind and am I loving my neighbor as I love myself?

Remember that the power for fruit bearing comes only from continuously abiding in Christ. Abiding includes living in His Word, depending upon Him in prayer, and dying to everything that is not Jesus. In Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, he warns us:

*“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”*

Paul also tells us what abiding in the Spirit gives us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). Is there an evident increase in love, joy, and peace in your life? Are you using your spiritual gifts in the body of Christ? Are



you currently bearing spiritual fruit? Who is following Jesus today as a spiritual fruit of your life?

The only way to produce fruit is to be so closely connected to Jesus, the Vine, that His life flows through you. Everything we try to do without Jesus ultimately comes to nothing. Unless it is done because of a conscious, abiding, dependence upon Him (John 15:5) it will remain undone. Experiencing His power to produce fruit is always a result of ongoing faith and prayer.

I urge you in the next few weeks to examine your life and make this Lenten season a time for true transformation, repentance and adopting new habits and patterns that will bring you closer to Christ and the life He wants for you.

To the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power both now and forever, Amen.