

Sunday Sermon April 29, 2018

Sermon Text: John 15:1-8

Sermon Theme: Christians produce fruits of faith. It's what they do.

## 1. Thankful Fruit 2. Abundant Fruit

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will 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.

<sup>5</sup> "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. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, 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 given you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

About 2 years ago a national insurance company ran a number of commercials with the phrase, "*It's What They Do*". They used things that we expect, very normal situations, and then they added the phrase, "*It's what they do*" after it. For instance: golf commentators talk quietly, *it's what they do*, people in horror movies make bad decisions, *it's what they do*, cats ignore you, *it's what they do*. In the end, we should buy their insurance because insurance, *it's what they do*.

We have a lot of family and friends that we are close with, that we come to expect things from. If our friend is a coffee drinker, we expect that they will walk in in the morning with a cup of coffee in their hand. *It's what they do*. If our spouse likes meat, they will not order off the vegetarian menu at the restaurant. Ordering a steak or a burger, *it's what they do*.

This works for both good and bad. If the kids never pick up their rooms, you will not expect them to be clean because messy *is what they do*. If your family member is loud and excitable and loves a certain sports team, you wouldn't expect them to sit through a sporting event of their favorite team and be absolutely silent. Cheering and talking to the TV *is what they do*.

What do people expect from you? What is your, "*it's what they do*" thing? Is it a phrase, an action, a habit? Is *what you do* God-pleasing or sinful?

In the Word of God before us this morning, Jesus uses an illustration from nature to point out something about a Christian's life. Christians bear fruit of thanks to him, *it's what they do*. These fruits are thankful and abundant.

Many times we think only about eating the fruit and not how the fruit got to our table. We forget that something brought that fruit life. Jesus talks about the life of grapes in our text. Jesus said, "**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.**"

You don't need to be a biology major to understand where fruit gets life from. When it comes to grapes, most of us understand that the fruit is attached to a branch, the branch is attached to the vine. It is the vine that has the necessary parts and functions so that it gets enough food, water, and sunlight. It is the vine that brings these life-giving nutrients from its core to the branches, and then from the branches to the fruit. It is the vine that is the life-giver, not the branch or the fruit.

Jesus used this illustration of a grape vine because grape vines are very hearty. I have several grape vines in my back yard. They are hard to kill. You can prune them and they will grow back in just a few days. You might think they are dead, but as long as the vine is alive it will continue to nourish the branches and the branches will try to grow grapes. Branches that are attached to the vine bear fruit, *it's what they do*. The only time the branch will not bear fruit is when it is cut off from the vine and dies.

Jesus uses these two very simple laws of nature to teach us about the Christian life. Jesus is the vine that gives life to us, the branches. He wants us to do something with that life, he wants us to bear fruit. Jesus brings us to himself in his suffering and death and makes us part of the promises of God that gives. This new life of faith began with the blood of Jesus. Through Jesus' suffering and death, our sins are washed away, we are holy.

He has made us members of his family, firmly attached to him by faith. Jesus gives us life. These blessings continue on as long as there is faith. Jesus says as long as we are in him, we will bear fruit of thanks.

Jesus also gives a warning. This is the second law of nature that we probably already know. ...**apart from me you can do nothing.** <sup>6</sup>**If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.** Though our Savior has joined us together with him by faith, this is not something that we should take for granted. We can wither and die and become separated from the love of the Savior through unbelief.

Unbelief shows itself in many ways. One of the most obvious ways is when we separate ourselves from the life-giving Gospel and refuse to hear the Word of God. Luther calls it despising preaching and his Word. We refuse to come to his house, we refuse to hear the Gospel, we refuse to take part in the Sacrament. We make up reasons why God comes last and not first. This is like the branch that is withering on the vine. Whether we do it with what we think are good reasons or for no reason at all, the result is the same. We are cutting ourselves off from the love of our Savior. We are separating ourselves from the Gospel which gives life through Jesus. We are like a branch that has cut itself off from the vine. It is dead and worthless.

While separating ourselves from the Gospel and our Savior is a very visible sign of unbelief, there are more subtle ways that we show our unbelief. Jesus points out that not bearing fruit is another, more subtle sign of faith trouble. **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.** Jesus simply says, “Christians bear fruits of faith, *it’s what they do.*” But what if we are not bearing fruits? What then?

We all need to ask ourselves, what fruit am I bearing for the Lord? What fruits of thanks in my life? Does my life include Christian service to the Lord and to others or is that the pastor’s job? Is that someone else’s job? Are my offerings of thanks in keeping with the grace that Christ has shown to you, or am I more concerned with my own welfare? Am I leading people to the Lord, letting my light shine, or am I making sure to hide that faith so that no one will know? Does my life include open, unrepentant sin and attitudes that are not only accepted, but also glorified? Does my church family see me so often in church and Bible study that they say that being in church, being in the Gospel, *it’s what they do?* Do they see me around church helping out on work days, during fellowship, ushering, cleaning, canvassing, taking part in leadership meetings and do they think serving the Lord, *it’s what they do?*

What fruits am I bearing? What is my thanks to the Lord? Are they fruits of faith and thanks to Jesus or are they fruits only for myself?

How do you thank someone when they do something nice for you? Maybe you return the favor? How do you thank someone for an unexpected gift? Maybe you thank them with a card, or gift as well. How do we thank God for the forgiveness that we do not deserve and eternal life which we do not earn? Jesus tells us, we bear fruit, *that’s what we do.*

The apostle James placed thanks to our Savior through our fruits, our works, as one of the largest outward signs of faith. He even said that if a man claims to have faith, but has no works of thanks to the Lord, his faith was dead.

Jesus tells us that as long as we have faith, that faith will want to show itself with fruits of thanks to the Lord. We saw some of those acts of faith in our other two readings this morning. Lydia opened her house to Paul and his companions and Philip was willing to be a missionary to a foreign man.

The Bible also gives us many other examples of people who thanked their Savior with fruits of thanks. We have Zaccheus, the Macedonian believers, Cornelius, Dorcas, Barnabus and Stephen are just a few examples of a very long list of people who were motivated by their Savior to bear fruit of time, talents or treasures and to serve their Lord and others with their fruit.

These were fruits of faith that came from hearts fruits of thanks, but they were also abundant fruits.

Notice that Jesus didn’t say, if a man remains in me, he will bear a fruit, he said MUCH fruit. When a grape vine blooms, it does not just produce a grape. It produces a cluster of grapes and not only one cluster, there are usually many clusters which are hidden beneath the leaves.

God has created in people with an amazing capacity to use their gifts in many different ways. Think of the ways that you express yourself every day. You use your gifts and abilities in hundreds, if not thousands of different ways. We can find many ways to use our gifts and talents to work, to amuse ourselves or to express our opinions our likes and dislikes.

It is important that we understand that if we can find many ways to use our gifts for ourselves, we can and should also find just as many ways to thank the Lord and to serve him and others with our words and actions. We look for ways to serve. We pitch in, in whatever way we can. We look for the obvious ways to serve and then some less obvious ways might turn up.

We not only bear fruit, but we bear it abundantly with a joyful heart. We see the opportunities God gives to service him and others and we take those tasks, not as burdens, but as blessings. We see each opportunity as a way to thank our Lord by bearing abundant fruits of thanks to him.

The vine brings life to the branches. With this life the branches bear fruit. Our Savior has brought us new life through his suffering and death. This new life has brought a life that we could never gain ourselves. This life that Jesus gives is free from sin and the fear of death. Now that we have life, we also have the ability to bear fruits of faith. We bear these fruits of thanks abundantly, thankfully to the Lord.

May we be motivated by our Savior's love to share in the work that he gives us here on earth. May we gladly put our faith into action by serving our Lord and others with our fruit of thanks. Amen