

Abide In Me

By pastor Bijoy

John 15:1-5

“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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. “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 chapter begins with verses that I’m pretty sure will be familiar to all of you. A much-loved section of John’s Gospel where Jesus teaches the disciples that he is the vine; that the Heavenly Father is the vinedresser, and they are the branches in the vine. We are in Christ becomes the most common way in the New Testament to describe what it means to be a Christian. In fact, it’s so common and so important that it’s absolutely essential for you and for me as Christians to think about ourselves in this way that -- Christ comes to dwell in us and that through faith we come to dwell in Christ so that all the resources and riches of grace in Jesus Christ become ours the moment we become Christians.

I sometimes wonder whether most Christians actually think of themselves that way. It's a question with asking about yourself, isn't it? It's the most common way in which I think about myself. Or to use the modern language -- Is my self-image as a Christian, to think of myself as somebody who is in Christ and in whom the Lord of glory dwells. Many of us when we become Christians – actually, we think of becoming a Christian as a very small thing. But here the New Testament is teaching us that it is a vast revolutionary reality in our lives. We are taken over by the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus, through his Spirit comes to dwell in us,

we come to be united to him and we live in his presence and by his power. And in order to help his disciples grasp this, Jesus uses this marvelous picture of the vine and the branches.

And of course, the notion of the vine was a picture that these disciples would've been familiar with already. The people of God in the Old Testament Scriptures were described as the vine of God's planting. And now Jesus is, as it were, taking us into the heart of that picture and saying "Now, I want you to see how this picture is fulfilled in my relationship with you. I am the vine; you are the branches. You draw your life from your union with me. I am in you and give you life. You are in me, and you draw on my resources. And in addition, think about it this way that the Heavenly Father is the vinedresser who looks after the vine and make sure that the vine will become gloriously useful".

Union with Christ – our source of fruitfulness

This union with Jesus he's describing as the vine and the branches and in this union the source of all our fruitfulness is to be found. We are able to deal with wealth and poverty, says the Apostle Paul, only because we are in Christ and have communion with Christ.

Notice how Jesus teaches the disciples here in verse 3 that he has made them clean through the word that he has spoken. He has cleansed them in order that he may use them. He has cleansed them in order that he may begin to cultivate them.

And they need to understand that unless they continue to draw in his resources, they can do no spiritual good. These very famous words he says in verse 5 – "Apart from me, you can do nothing". But what does this mean to abide in Jesus Christ? Let me just use one great statement Paul makes in Galatians 2, verse 20 that in a nutshell tells us what it means to live in Christ as the source of all our fruitfulness. Remember how he says there – "I have been crucified with Christ. I am no longer living for myself. I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me and I live as one in whom Christ dwells."

Pruning of the Heavenly Father

But then there's a second thing that we need to learn and that is our union with Christ will involve the pruning of the Heavenly Father. And this is incredible, isn't it, of this illustration that Jesus uses – I am the vine, you are the branches. And if the branches are going to bear fruit, one of the things the vinedresser, who is cultivating the vine and who is looking for fruit, will do, is pruning the branches. Not in order to destroy them but in order that they may bear more fruit. Now, if you have vines or perhaps some of you have vineyards, or if you are a gardener, then you understand this principle of pruning. If you are not a gardener, it seems that you would apparently destroy in order that there might be more fruit. But what you're doing is you're cutting away anything that is diseased and you're building your vine so that it may bear more and more fruit in the long term.

And so, when we are pruned, we ask question – “why are you doing that?”

Because we are branches, our response to pruning is often to say “oh, that hurts,” “stop it!”

And we need to understand this picture that if we're United to Jesus Christ,

the way the Father often makes us most fruitful is by the way he cuts away from our lives everything that is extraneous to his central purpose to use us for his glory.

Sometimes for us, it seems both wasteful and sore but not to the Heavenly Father and not to the disciples who understands what it is the Heavenly Father is doing. And nothing he does is ever wasted as he makes us more and more fruitful.

Nourished by the word.

And In verse 3 he says to them, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” He's worked in our hearts to bring us new life, to cleanse our hearts. He's done the fundamental work in order to make us fruitful in the future. But then he says in verse 7, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” What's he speaking about here? Well, what does it mean to let Christ dwell in our hearts?

It means to let his word dwell richly in our hearts as the Apostle Paul says. Just focus on that word richly for a moment. It means to soak in the word of God. It means to leave no room in our lives that are locked to the influence and power of the word of God. And Jesus is saying “this is the instrument that I use in order to make my branches fruitful”. How much we need to grasp that in our own time? To understand that “we will be made more fruitful the more the word of God is inscribed in our lives.” Some of you will know that C.H. Spurgeon, the great Victorian Baptist preacher, once said about John Bunyan; that if you put a needle into him in any part of his body, he would flow bibline. And you see what he was saying. He was saying – the man had absorbed the word of God. And the word of God had transformed his life.

Christianity is about far more than holding right beliefs or adopting right behaviors. But we have more. We also have *communion with God*. We have access to a life-giving, soul-thrilling, joy-producing communion with God through Christ (1 John 1:3; John 15:11). The Christian faith is about union *and* communion with Jesus. Union with Christ without communion with Christ is joyless Christianity.

Our hearts should desire this intimate relationship. We should long for this fellowship with God. David reflects this posture when he prays, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1). David earnestly seeks God. His soul thirsts for God. There is desperation. There is desire. Oh, to have a heart that echoes his!