

John: 15:1-8  
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The Holy Gospel according to John, the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Rooted To(tee), Fresh and Fruity**

When I was a little girl - oh, about eight, I think - my family rented this old house. In the back yard - along the alley way, there was this scraggly old vine. As I was out exploring one day - much to my delight - I noticed it had some fruit - it looked a lot like grapes! Well, I loved grapes - so I picked a handful of them found a nice quiet place to sit and start eating them. Oooh - yummm - I was almost tasting the sweet juiciness! - I popped one in my mouth — eeeuuu - yuch!!!! BOY, DID IT TASTE AWFUL!! What WERE these things? Well, they were SUPPOSED to be grapes - - really - - but quite unknowingly, I had stumbled upon what appeared to my eight year old eyes -to be a good vine and good fruit - - but instead, as I look back, I realize that the vine had been old, scraggly, not well tended - withered away and well past any ability to bear fruit at all - let alone good fruit.

In today's gospel, Jesus talks a lot about vines, branches and fruit. Together, let us take a few moments to explore what he is saying.

Jesus begins with an 'I AM' statement. When I hear an I AM statement, I immediately think of the answer that God gave Moses in Exodus.(3:14) God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God revealed himself to his people Israel by making his name known to them. A person's name, especially in the Old Testament, expresses that person's very essence and identity and the meaning of that person's life. And so it is with God. God has a name; he is not an anonymous force - a

being, somewhere out there.. .For God to disclose his name is to make him known to others; to become accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally. God, who reveals his name as "I AM", reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them.

The divine name, "I AM" expresses God's faithfulness, despite the faithLESSness of humanity's sin and the punishment it deserves. God instead loves us so much that he gives the life of his only son, Jesus to free us from sin. This is no small love - it is a love of the highest kind - a sacrificial love. God's love for us is so great and so pure that it is hard for us to grasp or even imagine. Jesus is also pure love. His love is obedient to the father. His love is humble. His love is gracious. His love is all-encompassing. Jesus lives in the Father and the Father lives in Jesus. Their relationship goes far beyond any kind of relationship we will ever see on earth. Everything Jesus says and does glorifies his father in heaven - and in turn, the father raises up and glorifies the son. Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name I AM in chapter 8 of John. (8:28) Jesus says. "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that "I AM he"."

In John there are six very familiar 'I AM' statements. 'I AM the bread of life', 'I AM the resurrection and the life', 'I AM the way, the truth and the life', 'I AM the door', 'I AM the Good Shepherd' - and today we hear 'I AM the true vine'. With each 'I AM' statement, Jesus reveals to us part of his divine nature - -who he is in a way that we might understand. In the first five statements Jesus not only reveals himself as the giver of life - but also includes an invitation to come to him and to believe in him. This last statement 'I AM the true vine' speaks to those who have already come to him and believe in him, - to us - and so his charge to us is that we remain in him.

Jesus Christ IS the true vine - planted in the earth - for he is the Word made flesh - The Word was with the father from the beginning - now the Word made flesh to dwell among us - not because he had to, but because he wanted to - not for his own sake, but for ours. Jesus Christ is the TRUE vine - as opposed to the many false vines that the world has to offer. It is only *in* the true vine, Jesus Christ, that we find sustenance and the promise of eternal life. The union of the human and the Divine natures of Christ and the fullness of the Spirit that is in him resemble the root of the vine made fruitful by the moisture from a rich soil.

Christ is the root of this vine and we are the branches. As children of God through our baptism, we are rooted to -joined to Christ who is pure love. Because we are rooted to Christ - we cannot live apart from him. Jesus tells us to remain in him. He tells us to abide in him and he will abide in us. To abide -to live - to have dependence in Christ is vital. Without him we can do nothing. We have constant need of the grace of Christ - for only in Him do we live, move and have our being. Christ is our justification and our sanctification. He is our salvation and our promise of everlasting life.

We all need to constantly be dependent on Christ and in communion with him - to stay rooted to him and to

get sustenance from him. Abide in him - by faith and by his Spirit - and he will abide in us. You know, the relationship we have with Christ never fails on Christ's side - but on ours. Although God allows us to reject him, his own disposition toward us is love, a love that continues to pursue even those who reject him. Though we might 'give up' on God, God never 'gives up' on us. Though we may become stubborn, willful children unable to carry out a relationship with God - God keeps trying - He keeps the dialog open - and this is good news for us!

Jesus talks about God's 'pruning' us. What does this mean? Well, it is easy to be tempted to lose faith in hard times - when the world presses in. It is also easy to become pre-occupied with ourselves - to turn inward and rely on ourselves instead of relying on God. In fact, we have much in our lives that is not in keeping with the life of God. These are 'false' growths that need to be pruned away so that God's eternal life might grow and increase in our lives. We might think of 'pruning' as sort of 'discipline' or a 'yanking' away' of those things that keep us from staying fully rooted to Christ. Think about some things in your life that might need pruning..... This pruning may be painful as our lives of self and rebellion are cut away - but the result is a freshness that is needed- a renewal of faith, so to speak - and an untold blessing for us and for the rest of the vine. God's pruning is for the sake of our growth in him.

Other ways that God refreshes and revives our faith - ways that keep us rooted to Christ are through word and sacrament. God's word is rich and life-giving. No matter how many times we delve into it - it is fresh and provides us with nourishment to live out our every day lives. When we live in Christ's word with regard to what he says - it is a light to our feet. When we live in Christ's merit as our righteousness it is our support and comfort. Through the waters of baptism, God adopts us as his children and calls us into everlasting life with him. Through communion we are forgiven, given fresh, new hearts and the grace and strength to follow God's calling for our lives.

But what if we turn away from Christ completely - reject him - decide that we don't need to abide in him? Well, without him we can do nothing right - oh, we might look like we are doing okay for a little while - and we try to make it on our own - but it won't be long before we are weak, self-centered, fall into sin and allow worldly ways to become our main source of nourishment. When we turn away - do not abide in Christ - we are no longer a healthy part of the vine and if we bear any fruit at all, it is probably bitter. Soon our gifts will wither, our zeal and devotion will wither - our hopes and comforts will wither - and apart from Christ we will die. When this happens, we are removed from the vine and are cast away.

So, our very life depends on remaining rooted to Christ. God's pruning, staying in God's word and receiving the sacrament help to keep our faith fresh, thereby allowing us to live more fully in Christ. And when we live- abide in Christ, Christ abides in us. The result of our remaining - abiding in Christ is that we bear much fruit. Now the fact that Jesus emphasizes our bearing fruit so many times in this passage is

important for us to note. The most important function of the vine is to bear fruit; therefore the most important function of a disciple is to bear fruit and to bear it abundantly.

What kind of fruit does Jesus mean? Well, the fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and faithfulness. How are we doing with these? I know that they are not always easy things for me to have. I think, though, if we look more closely at these fruits, there is one that stands out above all the others – because all the others flow from it. That fruit is love. That's right – love - - simply love. Well, maybe not so simple after all... What kind of love are we talking about?

Earlier, I pointed out that as the True Vine, Jesus is planted in the earth – for he is the Word made flesh – the Incarnation. Heaven came down to earth in Jesus Christ – and because of him we have eternal life. The gift of God is meant to be seen and touched – heard and followed in Jesus Christ. Jesus brought love to earth. Jesus was obedient to the father – true love – love made real. Because Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches there are deep connections between us and Jesus. These connections are about what it means to be human, to be created in God's image and to be connected to God as God's children.

Because of this relationship of love – we can no longer remain who we are; we are transformed by the love of God through Jesus Christ. And we need to be who we say we are. We need to be what we call ourselves. As children of God - disciples of Christ, our love from abiding in Christ will make us different than the rest of the world. What people 'see' in us as disciples of Jesus is important. Discipleship – believing and loving means becoming more and more like Jesus through our actions. Jesus' love was obedient to the father; our love needs to be obedient. Jesus' love was sacrificial; our love needs to be sacrificial. Jesus' love was humble; our love needs to be humble. Jesus' love is gracious; our love needs to be gracious. Jesus' love is all-encompassing; our love needs to be all-encompassing. If God is saving the world through Jesus, then people will see God in our actions – and the world will become a place of life and of hope. When we love as Jesus loves, we are changed in the process. This is what happens when we abide in Christ and Christ in us. Scary thought, huh?? To have this relationship – as the branches to the vine – makes us different than the rest of the world. And when we abide in Christ this fully, we cannot help but bear abundant fruit.  
AMEN.