

Jesus: I AM the vine

Message for Sunday, August 25, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 15:1-10

Children's Message: from John 15:5.

I brought a plant from our home for you to see. I hope you like it. I always marvel at how things grow: they start from a small seed, and they just grow.

What if I tried to help this plant by teaching it how to grow? “Now the most important thing is, the roots go down, and the leaves go up. You don’t want to get that mixed up. Do you understand? Just nod your branch up and down a bit. (*I help it to nod.*) Good. I want to be sure you understand this, so I brought a book which has pictures in it. See this picture, how the roots go down in the soil, and the green part goes up? That’s what I want you to do.”

[To the children] Do you think I’m helping this plant to grow? Not really. It doesn’t need me. As long as it gets food and water from the soil, it will grow automatically.

But look: there are some leaves on this plant which don’t look very healthy. Look at them closely, and see if you can figure out what the problem is.

(Several days earlier I cut them, then taped them in place, but so that the cut ends were not next to each other.)

Someone cut the stems of those leaves. They stopped getting food and water from the soil, so they shrivelled up and died.

Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.”

Stay connected to Jesus, and we will grow to be like him.

Message: “Jesus: I AM the vine”

1) Our purpose in life: to bear fruit

John 15:5-6, Today’s English Version:
[Jesus said,] “I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned.”

Jesus is the vine. You and I are the branches. The purpose of the branches is to bear fruit. The branches that do not produce anything are cut off and discarded in a fire. I don’t think Jesus uses this analogy as a threat, but rather as a warning. Each fall and each spring, the police issue a warning over the radio and TV: “Stay off the ice. It’s dangerous right now.” They are not threatening you. They are not out to get you. It is simply a warning: if you go on thin ice, you’re likely to get in trouble.

Jesus is simply stating a basic fact of life: a life that does not produce fruit is a wasted life. People whose concern is only for themselves, and who care little for how they will give back to God and to the world around them, will find themselves cut off from the very reward they were seeking. Jesus put it this way:

Luke 9:24, New Living Translation:

“If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.”

2) The key to an abundant harvest

Jesus said the purpose of the branches is to bear fruit. What kind of fruit does Jesus want? Another place in the Bible answers that.

Galatians 5:22-23, Good News Bible:

But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

These are the fruit of the Spirit. This is the fruit that Jesus longs to see happen in our lives.

So how do you grow love? How do you grow joy? What if you’re not a very joyful person? How can a person who by nature is hot-tempered, impatient and ornery become someone who is peaceful, patient and kind? The answer is simple: you can’t.

Maybe you’ve tried. You wake up in the morning, and look yourself sternly in the mirror. You growl between your clenched teeth and say, “Today I will be happy.”

Or, “I’m going to be patient, and I’m going to be patient right now.”

Or, “OK, I’ll be a cheerful giver. Give me that stupid offering plate.”

Or, “I’m going to forgive that creep if it kills me.”

There’s a legend about two princes who had an disagreement about how closely related animals are to humans. So their mother the queen told them to go out

and find some specimens to prove their theory. They would present them to the court in a month's time.

The brother who thought animals were very similar to humans scoured the country, and one day heard about an extraordinary cat. The cat could walk on its hind legs. It could drink from a teacup. And amazingly, the cat could talk! The brother bought the cat from its owner, and brought it back home with him. Everyone who saw the cat exclaimed how wonderful it was.

The other brother knew he was in trouble. No matter what animal he found, the amazing cat would dazzle everyone. Then he had an idea. He dropped in to the local flour mill, and came back with a small box. He showed no one what was inside it.

The next day was the time for them to present their cases. One brother introduced the cat to the court. The cat was dressed in a fine silk jacket. It sat up at the table and daintily drank tea from a china cup. Then it conversed with the king and queen about the problems facing the country. Everyone was struck with wonder and awe at this amazing cat.

Then the other brother brought out his box. He took the lid off, and out jumped four mice. The cat stopped talking in mid-sentence, leaped across the table and took off after the mice.

It takes more than tricks and talents for a cat to become like a human being. And it takes more than willpower and determination for a person to change their character.

Happily for us, Jesus does not tell us to change our character.

Huh? What about bearing fruit?

Ah yes, bearing fruit. The thing is, Jesus does not *command* us to bear fruit. He certainly talked about bearing fruit, but never as a commandment. What, then, *does* Jesus command us to do? Read John 15 for yourself:

“Remain united to me...” [verse 4]

“... only if it remains in the vine.” [verse 4]

“... you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.” [verse 4]

“Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit” [verse 5]

“If you remain in me...” [verse 7]

“... remain in my love.” [verse 9]

“... you will remain in my love...” [verse 10]

Seven times in these few verses the idea is repeated!

Our job? It's very simple: live close to the vine. As long as we do that, we'll produce loads of fruit. Life comes through the vine. Cut the branch off from the vine, and it dies. Jesus said in plainly:

John 15:5, Today's English Version:

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."

For some people, this sounds like a self-centred religion: it's all about me and Jesus. That's where the fruit comes in. A dead branch isn't going to do anything for anyone, including itself. A branch that is alive and thriving will produce an abundant harvest. Remember: it's the fruit of the *Spirit*. A person who has an abundant life in Jesus will bear the fruit in their actions.

“I am the true vine,” Jesus says. We are the branches. The branches receive life from the vine. We receive life from Jesus. That's the key to everything.

Next Steps:

- How would you describe yourself? Loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, and so on – or the other: selfish, grumpy, angry, frustrated, etc.? Perhaps some from both groups?
- Are you pleased being like that? Would you like to be a more positive person?
- You can be! Live close to Jesus. Spend time with him. Begin your day inviting him into your life, and follow him throughout the day.