

## CHRIST THE BRANCH AND OUR CALL TO BEAR FRUIT

### (3) YOU ARE THE BRANCHES

Proverbs 11:28-31

Galatians 5:16-24

John 15:5-11

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### SCRIPTURE

<sup>1</sup> Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup> but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. <sup>3</sup> They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper (Psalms 1:1-3 NRSV).

<sup>28</sup> Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves. <sup>29</sup> Those who trouble their households will inherit wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise. <sup>30</sup> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes lives away. <sup>31</sup> If the righteous are repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner! (Proverbs 11:28-31 NRSV).

<sup>16</sup> Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:16-24 NRSV).

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you

will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete (John 15:5-11 NRSV).

### **MESSAGE**

We are continuing our series on Christ the Branch and Our Call to Bear Fruit. Each message features a key verse related to Christ, our Branch, and then applies that verse to how we should grow in our own faith as plantings of the Lord.

The key verse for today is from John's Gospel:

“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” (John 15:5 NRSV).

According to Psalm 1, the righteous are like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season. In all they do, they prosper. The wicked are like the left-over bits of dead leaves, the chaff that is blown away by the wind. Wicked people fall and fail. Righteous people prosper. That sounds right. That sounds like the way things should happen, but often in our world it doesn't always happen that way. Instead, wicked people often hurt others. Wicked people prosper in their ways and oppress the righteous. Often it is the people who try to live godly lives who suffer at the hands of those who are evil. Wicked people often seem to be very firmly planted, growing strong and powerful. Righteous people suffer pain, injustice and loss at the hands of the wicked.

According to Psalm 1, wicked people fall. Righteous people prosper. It doesn't always work that way in our sinful world, and it didn't work that way in the life of our Lord Jesus. The wicked enemies of Jesus prospered in their plans against him. Their plot to have him arrested, tried and put to death was successful. Jesus, the righteous Branch, the only truly righteous human being, was nailed to the tree of the cross and cut down in death. He died and was buried in a sealed and guarded tomb. The wicked people prospered. The Righteous One fell.

But on the third day after Jesus' death, everything was turned upside down! The plans of the wicked and the evil plot that brought down Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, collapsed in ultimate failure. The plans and powers of Satan, the Evil One himself, were taken down in defeat. The sealed tomb was opened and found to be empty! Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch of David's line, was raised to life. All the plans and promises of God for our salvation prospered in Jesus' nail-scarred hands! The wicked were like chaff that the wind drives away. Jesus, the Righteous One, was like a tree planted by streams of water,

yielding fruit, prospering in all that he did. It had been God's plan all along, and now it was accomplished.

Jesus, the righteous Branch, is our living and life-giving Vine. That is what he called himself: "I am the vine; you are the branches." By faith we are grafted into our nourishing Vine. "Apart from me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing." In fact, those who reject him, those who cut themselves off from him, Jesus describes in a way that resembles the wicked chaff of the psalm:

"Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (Jn 15:6).

Those who by faith are grafted into the living Vine are like the fruit-yielding righteous people of the psalm:

"Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit" (Jn 15:5b).

Connected to our living Vine, what sort of fruit grows in our lives? Just what kind of fruit do we produce? The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, describes that fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It's fruit that is always in season and, the apostle notes, "Against such things there is no law."

Cooperating with the Spirit develops a Christ-like character in us. The fruit of the Spirit is the evidence that we are becoming like Christ.

Laura Smith writes:

Our young daughter was learning the fruit of the Spirit, so I asked her to recite them to me. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and remote control!" was her reply.

While some of us probably need a remote control for our self control, all of us need to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. By the way, the word "fruit" is in the singular indicating that all nine qualities make up the fruit. In other words, we cannot pick and choose. I seem to recall an anecdote about C. S. Lewis. He prayed for patience. The subsequent week was so fraught with frustration and disappointment that the next week he asked God for a different virtue! In any case, the Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit works to develop all nine qualities in us, but not without our cooperation.

What does such prosperous fruit-bearing look like in your daily life? It's one thing to speak of peace and patience, but think of that peace and patience growing in your life when you're caught in traffic, or when things are not going well at work. What if you are facing trouble or illness? What does fruit-bearing look like then? Remember the rich fruit of goodness and faithfulness in your relationships. That's a place to exercise gentleness and self-control, also, fruit that would grow well not only in your home but in your workplace or school, too. All of the fruit might be summed up in the rich fruit of love, love that reflects the self-sacrificing love of Jesus, our righteous Branch and life-giving Vine. What will fruit-bearing look like in your home or at work?

The blessed persons of Psalm 1, "those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers," appear to have such Spirit-grown fruit in their lives. But notice, too, that they are connected by faith to the living Vine:

"Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night" (Ps 1:2).

Day and night we can be nourished in Christ our Vine. We receive his gifts of Word and Sacrament to feed our faith as we are attached firmly to our source of life and salvation. Delighting in and fed by Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, we bear the fruit of the Spirit in love and service to others.

Nourished and enlightened by the life-giving Word, we now know that even though the wicked, the enemies of God, prosper in their wickedness, there will come a day of when, apart from Christ, they cannot stand. "The way of the wicked will perish," as the psalmist said.

But attached by faith to Christ our Vine, we, his branches, will stand firm in the day of judgment, together with all "the congregation of the righteous." Until that great day, Jesus our Vine nourishes our faith with his love and forgiveness. In his name, the fruit of the Spirit grows in our lives. We love and serve others – family, friends, co-workers, neighbors – as witnesses to Jesus our Vine, who gave his life that we, and they, might live. In our love and service, others will see Jesus and his love. By the power of the Spirit they may come to faith and so give glory to the Father. Jesus said:

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (Jn 15:8).

Grafted by faith into Jesus our Vine, nourished by his Spirit, let's keep growing.