

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**John 15:4-5, 8**  
**Sermon #688**  
**May 10, 2015**  
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**<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.**

Dear Friends in our Risen Lord,

Regardless of age, everybody is somebody's child, and throughout our country today, children will think about their mothers. Those whose mothers have passed on will reflect upon their memories, while many of those whose mothers remain on earth will honor them with some sort of remembrance.

So, through the form of a card or a telephone call, many will make efforts to reach out and stay connected to the one that physically brought them into this world and continues to love them with a mother's love. The honor bestowed upon mothers on this day is both fitting and well-deserved. To have been nurtured and cared for by a loving mother – especially a Godly mother – is a singular blessing from God.

But as great as the bond is between mother and child – and as worthy as this day is for calling it to mind – our text for this morning reminds us of an even greater and deeper relationship we enjoy as Christians. It is a bond that goes beyond the physical and surpasses the emotional. It is the *spiritual* relationship that exists between Christ and the believer. The national observation of Mother's Day may remind us of the importance of staying connected to our mothers, but the Word we have before us impresses upon us the vital need to

STAY CONNECTED TO JESUS

In our text we find

1. Encouragement
2. Promises

### 3. Results

associated with this connection.

In the statement before us (one of seven great “I AM” pronouncements Jesus makes in the Gospel of John) Jesus calls Himself the vine and us the branches. It is not difficult to understand the imagery. Jesus, the vine, is the source of our spiritual life. We, the branches will grow and flourish spiritually only as long as we stay attached, or connected to Him. And the stronger and longer we are attached, the more we grow and produce fruit. That’s the general overview. Let’s take a look at some of the specific lessons before us today...

First, in this exposition we find strong words of encouragement. Within these 8 verses, the word “remain” is used 8 times, and the idea of us “remaining in Christ” is mentioned 5 times. If the importance of something is to be judged solely by the number of times it is repeated, what Jesus wants us to know is that He considers it vitally important that we remain connected to Him.

But it goes even farther than a mere statement of fact: By repeating this statement again and again Jesus is issuing each of us a call for exertion, diligence and effort when it comes to our relationship with Him.

To understand this correctly, it is necessary that we have a proper Scriptural understanding of conversion. The opening hymn, “*Lord, 'Tis Not that I Did Choose Thee,*” reminded us that we did not choose Christ to be *our* own, but Christ chose us to be *His* own. In other words, our coming to faith is not the result of a decision we made, but the result of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and bringing us to faith. That’s why, when it comes to being in the faith, the Apostle Paul in the Book of Ephesians refers to it as being an act of God’s grace, not of our own work.

However, once we *are* in the faith, how we use it and act on it and live it out *is* our responsibility. Therefore, when Jesus asks us to “remain in Him,” He is suggesting something we can do. He is suggesting that *there*

*are steps we can take to “remain in Him.” What are they? What can we do to “remain in Christ?”*

First and foremost, we remain connected to Him through being actively involved in Word and Sacrament. Worship, Bible study, personal devotions, and daily contemplation of Christ and what He has done for us through His life, death and resurrection keeps us close to Him. Taking the Lord’s Supper regularly and thoughtfully keeps us close to Him. An active prayer life – talking with Jesus – helps us “remain in Him.”

Behind these suggestions is the idea that we can and will remain deeply connected to Christ only to the proportion that we make our relationship with Him a priority in our lives. In other words, we will get out of this relationship what we put into it.

Keeping that thought in mind helps us understand something else we are told here. In the second verse of our text Jesus talks about how the Father as the Heavenly Gardener makes an active branch stronger and even more fruitful by trimming it clean.

Even a novice gardener knows that for a plant to grow strong and healthy you have to pinch off the offshoots and the excess branches. Too many of them rob the main plant (or branch) of its strength and vitality and stunt its growth. That’s the idea Jesus is communicating here.

Now apply that kind of illustration to our spiritual lives. God Himself may choose to cut back things in our lives to make us stronger. Those are His decision and fall in the category of His divine and fatherly will for us, His children.

But let’s talk about this in terms of things that we ourselves have control over. We have to be aware of those distractions and offshoots that rob us of our spiritual vitality... that keep us from developing and properly cultivating our spiritual lives... that sap the strength of our connection with Christ. What are some of those things?

Maybe it's the business of our lives. It's an interesting observation indeed that in this age of time and labor saving devices the malady of "stress" and stress-related problems are at an all time high. A lot of Americans, and maybe you're among them, feel they have too much to do with too little time to do it. And so something has to go. And if that something is related to cultivating our spiritual lives, it's hard to grow.

Then there are all the distractions that can sap us emotionally and spiritually. Everyday we have items and issues and tasks that vie for our time and energy. Everyday we have choices to make. Lots of choices. Sometimes too many choices. And many of us have learned that we can't really say yes to one thing without saying no to another.

Ever had a discussion with yourself on the subject of priorities? Have you ever, at some time in your life, usually after feeling overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done (many of which are self-imposed) or upon discovery that what you've strived for and achieved at great personal expense isn't nearly as satisfying as originally thought, given yourself a good talking to and said, "Man, I've just *got* to get my priorities straight"?

I would guess most of us have had that internal conversation. And the very fact we have that conversation indicates that too often we *know* we chase after the wrong things.

Some years ago a man by the name of Charles Hummel wrote a magazine article, later put in booklet form, entitled: "The Tyranny of the Urgent." The essence of the article is the distinction he makes between the "urgent" and the "important." Let me read a couple of paragraphs:

*We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important. The problem is that the important task rarely must be done today, or even this week. Extra hours of prayer and Bible study, a visit with that non-Christian friend, careful study of an important book: these projects can wait. But the urgent tasks call for instant action – endless demands pressure every hour and day...*

*...The momentary appeal of [urgent] tasks seems irresistible and important, and they devour our energy. But in the light of time's perspective their deceptive*

*prominence fades; with a sense of loss we recall the important tasks pushed aside. We realize we've become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.*

How does this apply to us? In this way: There is nothing more important than our relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior. He is the One who lived for us and died for our sins. He is the One who now, at this very moment, lovingly oversees our lives and awaits us to join Him in the heavenly mansion He has prepared for us. Until that time He asks us to forego all the *urgent* things in order to fulfill the one *important* task of "remaining in Him." This is His encouragement to us...

And as we do, He attaches a promise. **"Remain in me, and I will remain in you."** What a piece of assurance. Jesus says, "Stay connected to Me, and I promise I'll stay connected to you." Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on Maundy Thursday. Earlier that evening He said something similar (recorded in John 14): **"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."** I'm not sure if we have the capability of fully understanding what Jesus is telling us here, but I know it's a beautiful thought. Christ lives within us and remains in us as we remain in Him...

The result of this intimate connection with Christ is stated in these words: **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.** And later on, **By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.**

The fruit of faith that God desires and that comes naturally from a branch connected to the vine manifests itself both *inwardly* and *outwardly*.

Inwardly, the predominant fruit of a connection with Christ is joy. Note that I didn't say happiness. Happiness is connected to our personal circumstances, but joy is an attitude that transcends our personal circumstances. Specifically, joy in the knowledge of our salvation. We know who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. We know **"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich."**

We know what will happen and where we will be the moment after we close our eyes in death. We know that we are but strangers here, and that heaven is our home – thanks be to Jesus. Other inward fruits of being connected to Christ follow and build off of this certitude of our salvation, such as peace... hope... contentment... and confidence.

And Jesus indicates the inward fruit cannot help but show itself *outwardly*. Those who know Christ and are deeply connected to Him through Word and Sacrament and prayer will reflect this relationship in their lives before a watching world. This is to God's glory, Jesus tells us – which puts us in the happy position of being able to glorify God by simply doing what comes naturally to a branch connected to the vine: bearing fruit.

Let's bring our thoughts to a close. Nationally today is about the connection between children and their mothers. As strong as that is, it reminds of an even greater, more glorious connection we enjoy: the relationship between Jesus and us.

It is both His will and our desire to stay connected. He is the vine, we are the branches. Our spiritual growth, development and ability to live out our lives to His glory depends entirely on keeping that connection strong...

Therefore may God give us the will, the power and the strength to elevate what is truly important over all urgent things in life. And may we always understand the importance, the blessings and the joy of staying connected to Christ. Amen.