

Easter 5 / May 2, 2021

John 15:4

“Abide in me and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

Vines, trees and branches are common images in the bible, by which the Holy Spirit expresses the believer's relationship with God. God planted Israel in the land of Canaan as “a choice vine.” However, later when Israel turned away and went after false gods He lamented, “How have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine.” There were many trees in the Garden of Eden, but two were especially important and prominent: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Adam and Eve destroyed their perfect relationship with God, with each other and with all creation by disobeying and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They cut themselves off from Vine in whom we live and move and have our being. God prevented them from living forever in the brokenness of sin and eating from the tree of life, by sending them out the garden and setting an angel as guard. They would not abide in Him and so they were driven from His presence and given over to death until the Redeemer came.

God established a relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and through them, created a nation whom He called Israel. The psalmists and the prophets spoke of Israel as the Lord's vineyard, His vine which He planted in the Promised Land of Canaan. The Lord was the vine. They were the branches. God Himself was the source of Israel's being, through whom they lived as His people. God's desire for Israel was that like a choice vine, they would bear the good fruit of righteousness; by having no gods beside Him; loving and treating each other with justice and respect; and making His Name know among the nations. Israel was to be a vine, whose branches extended throughout the world and reached out to the nations, so that others would know the Lord and be joined to them as members of the people of God. God was the true vine, the source of their relationship Him. If they would abide in Him, He would abide in them and they would bear much fruit! And so Jesus said to the disciples and to us today, “Abide in me and I in you.”

In our gospel this morning Jesus uses the same image of vine and branches, to emphasize that our relationship with God is based on our relationship with Him and dependant on our remaining in Him, through faith and in faithfulness. He said, “I am the vine; you are the branches.” He is the source of our relationship with the Father. He made peace between God and humanity and undid the effects of Adam's sin, through the blood of His cross. He brings peace to our lives through faith in the forgiveness He earned through the faithful service of His life and the sacrifice of His cross. He plants the seed of faith in our hearts through the word, refreshes it through the water of our baptism, nourishes it through the food of holy communion and encourages faith and faithfulness through our worship and fellowship with one another.

He is both the source of our relationship with the Father and with Himself. Several verses after our text He said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” Like Israel of old whom God chose in love and called to be His own, Jesus chooses us in love and calls us through the gospel that we may be His own treasured possession; have life with God through Him and bear fruit in Him. The fruit that we bear is the same fruit God desired in ancient Israel: have no God but Him, love Him and our neighbours from our hearts and extend His vineyard by telling others about His love and salvation expressed fully in Jesus the Saviour. Apart from Him we have nothing and can do nothing. In Him we have life and every gift of the Spirit both believe and to produce the good fruit of faithfulness to Him. “Abide in me and I in you.”

‘Abide’ literally means to remain somewhere, or to wait for something. Its a fancy way of saying “stay here,” or “wait over there.” It's not a word people commonly use these days and some translations have replaced it with “remain,” “stay,” or “wait.” The NIV translation says, “Remain in me and I will remain in you.” Even though its not a common word in our daily speech, ‘abide’ carries a deeper sense of intimacy than ‘stay.’ Abide is related to the word ‘abode,’ which refers to the place where we live. Your place of abode is your home. Jesus is not telling us to park ourselves, He's calling us to live in Him. He is not a stopping place. He lives in us and we live in Him. He dwells within us through His Holy Spirit. We dwell in Him through our membership in His body, the holy Christian Church. He is the source of our life with the Father. In Him we live and move and have our being, as children of the heavenly Father. He calls us to realize these things, see the importance of our relationship with Him and treasure Him above all things, as source of our life with the heavenly Father. He is the vine and we are the branches!

We live in Him, not by bearing fruit. We bear fruit by living in Him. We live in Him by drawing near to Him through the means by which He draws near to us; in the word and through the sacraments. He draws us to Himself through these. We draw near and abide in Him through these. The Psalmist sang, "Your word O Lord is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life." His words are Spirit and truth. He spoke the word and the sick were made well, the injured were made whole and the dead raised to life. He speaks the word by which we are raised from spiritual death to life through faith in Him. He has the words of eternal life. We abide in Him by sitting at His feet and listening to His word. He nourishes our spirits in the word and water of baptism, speaking words of forgiveness. He feeds us with the word through the gift of His body and blood under the forms of bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins. We abide in Him through these means of grace and He abides in us.

We abide in Him by gathering as a body of believers. In our worship, prayer and fellowship with each other He draws near to us and we draw near to Him. The church is the body of Christ, in whom Christ dwells through His Holy Spirit, given to us to dwell within us and among us. He is the vine and we are the branches. Even as the parts of a plant, a tree or a vine remain alive and healthy when they are joined together to the main plant; we remain healthy and alive by being joined together in Christ in worship, prayer and fellowship. Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches, abide in me and I in you." St. Paul called the church the body of Christ saying, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit." As we gather to drink together of one Spirit to listen to His voice and receive the blessing of forgiveness and to be nourished through the gift of His body and His blood, we abide in Him and He abides in us.

We bear fruit, the good fruit of faith, through faithfulness to His word, by faithfully sharing His name and by living with each other in His love. What is the fruit that God desires of us? The fruit that God desires is that we believe in the name of the Son whom He sent to be our Saviour. Even as a vine naturally causes the branches to bear good fruit, so Christ naturally causes those who believe in Him to bear good fruit. What is this good fruit? First and foremost, it is to believe in His Name. To have faith in Him the vine. Secondly, it is to share His name and His love with others. It is essential to know what a good work is in God's eyes. The work of God that is good and which produces goodness in us, is to believe in Jesus as our Saviour and to live in faithfulness to His name and love.

It is as God said to the prophet Micah: "He has told you O man what is good: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." We walk humbly with God, by abiding in Christ our Saviour. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which He created in advance and empowers us to do as a result of our relationship with Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. Branches are produced by the vine. Branches produce good fruit because of the vine. Branches live by abiding in the vine. God bless us with His Spirit and His grace that we may abide in Christ until He produces in us the good fruit of eternal life by calling us to rise in His resurrection. In His name. Amen