

John 15:1-17
Isaiah 5:1-7
Psalm 80

“Abide in Me”

August 30, 2020

There was once a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

The owner went out and carefully, painstakingly, prepared the soil,
planted the finest vines,
and looked for it to produce fine fruit.
But it yielded stink fruit.

Isaiah tells us that this was a picture of the house of Israel.

God had carefully planted Judah on his holy hill,
but they had not produced good fruit,
instead they had rebelled against him,
entered foreign alliances,
worshiped other gods,
and had oppressed the poor and the helpless.

Therefore God declares that he will trample down his vineyard, and make it a waste.
Briers and thorns will overrun the vineyard.

But as you go further into Isaiah’s prophecy you hear of a branch
growing out of the stump of Jesse.

In Isaiah 27, Isaiah speaks of “a pleasant vineyard” where Jacob will take root,
and Israel “shall fill the whole world with fruit.”

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 80 –
a Psalm that follows on the theme of Isaiah’ vine.

Verse 8 says that God brought a vine from Egypt and planted it in the land –
but now the vine has been broken down –
what Isaiah warned has, in fact, happened!

Psalm 80 – after all – is part of Book 3 of the Psalter –
the Psalms of the Exile.

The temple is destroyed – and the Son of David is held captive.

But the Psalmist recognizes that there is still a future for this vine –
and he particularly identifies the vine with the “son of man.”

And since the blending of Isaiah and the Psalms is so much of what you see in
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel – we used the tune with Psalm 80!

Sing Psalm 80
Read John 15:1-17

Introduction: The Vine

Isaiah had spoken of Israel as the vine.

Psalm 80 had connected the vine with the son of man.

With all this in view,

Jesus says "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

There is no clearer way for Jesus to say, "I am the true Israel."

Jesus is the one who produces good fruit,

and fills the whole world with that fruit.

He explains this by saying, "I am the vine; you are the branches."

Isaiah had spoken of the people of God as the vine,

but the people of God had failed miserably.

So Jesus takes this familiar image, and redefines it.

All that the prophets had said about Israel as the vineyard is about me.

But this does not mean that you and I have no place in God's vineyard.

It simply means that we are not the vine.

Rather, we are the branches.

I love John 14 so much, I thought about going back and preaching another sermon from John 14!

But as I considered what Jesus is saying in John 15,

I realized that John 15 is simply exploring the same themes as John 14 –
just using the image of the vine.

So by preaching John 15, we are still talking about the themes of John 14!

In John 14 we heard about how the Triune God is bringing you into fellowship with himself.

Jesus explains how the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father

(this is what is meant by "perichoresis" or "mutual indwelling").

So if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father.

And yet, because of the mutual indwelling

of the persons of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit –

the Spirit dwells in you as the presence of the resurrected Christ.

The same Spirit who came upon Jesus in his baptism

is the same Spirit who comes upon you in your baptism –

so that you are united to the life of God by faith.

The coming of the Spirit

is the coming of Jesus to dwell with his people –

and through the Spirit, the Father and the Son come and make their home with us.

In other words, the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit

now comes to be shared with us.

"I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

Everything in the Christian life is rooted in this.

It's why Jesus focuses on the theme of *abiding* – remaining – dwelling.

What does it mean for us to be "in Christ"?

It means for us to be united to the life of God.

Each of the two sections in our passage starts with a focus on *abiding*, then turns to the importance of *bearing fruit*, before keying in on *prayer*.

Why do our prayers so often seem ineffectual and useless?

Well, if we are not abiding in Christ –

(which means) if we are not connected to him –

then we are not going to bear much fruit

(have you ever seen a disconnected branch bear fruit?)

And if we are not connected to him – and thus we are not bearing fruit – then don't be surprised when your prayers seem ineffectual!

And that's why Jesus says, "I am the true vine."

1. The Vine and the Branches (v1-8)

a. Abide: the Vine, the Vinedresser, and the Branches (v1-4)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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.

Jesus encourages us to think about the image of the vine in more detail.

If you take a vine without any branches, how much fruit do you get?

None.

Jesus has just said, "whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

Jesus will do his greatest works through his church.

Without the church, Jesus is like a vine without branches.

His fruit is borne in us and through us.

He is the bridegroom—we are the bride.

A husband without a wife won't have very many children!

But of course, without Jesus, the church is like branches without a vine.
What is a branch without a vine?
Dead.

The life of the branch flows through the vine.
Indeed, the life of the branch is nothing more or less than the life of the vine.
He is our life.
It is not simply that we have life *because* of him,
but rather that we have life *in* him.
Branches do not live independently of the vine.
Branches live only because of their vital union to the vine.
So it is Christ's life in you that gives you life.
I am the vine; you are the branches.

This is why Jesus speaks of the Father as the vinedresser.
If a branch connected to the vine does not bear fruit,
then the vinedresser takes it away—hacks off the whole thing.
In other words, if the life of the vine is not manifest in the branch,
then the branch is cut off, thrown away and burned.
In our baptism, we are united to Christ and his church.
But if that union is not a vital union.
In other words, if we are only externally joined to the vine,
then the branch will not bear fruit, but will be cut off, and destroyed.

Because if you are vitally united to Christ, then you will bear fruit!
“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.”
Whoever abides in Jesus will bear much fruit.

What does Jesus mean by fruit?

b. Bear Fruit: Whoever Abides in Me Bears Much Fruit (v5-6)

⁵ 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. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Remember Isaiah 5?

God looked for justice and righteousness, but found only bloodshed and an outcry.
What has Jesus been talking about in chapter 14?
“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (14:15)
“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” (14:23)

Abiding in Christ means to find the source of life –
your power for living – in Jesus.
And bearing fruit means doing what he says.
The problem in Isaiah 5 is that Israel has an insufficient power supply.
Israel cannot be the vine.
They do not have life in themselves.

But Jesus tells us in John 5:26—the Father has given the Son to have life in himself.
And because he has life in himself,
he has the power to give life to his people.

This is why it is so necessary for you to despair of your own power!
Your life is but a feeble flicker in the corridors of time.
You do not have the power to bear fruit in the service of Christ.

Therefore you must abide in Christ.
He is the light of the world who came to give life to his people.

You need to trust Jesus!

c. Pray: If You Abide in Me, and My Word Abides in You, Ask Whatever You Wish (v7-8)

⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

(Verse 7) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
The one who abides in Jesus, whose life flows from the exalted Savior,
may indeed ask for whatever he wishes!

Psalm 37:4 speaks of this: “Delight yourself in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
Later in verse 31, the Psalmist adds, “the law of God is in his heart,
His steps do not slip.”
The one who abides in Christ has the words of God engraved on his heart,
which means that your desires are conformed to his.
And so of course, whatever you ask is yours—
because you only ask for that which is good and right!

I know that this has been the cause of much soul-searching for many people.
How do I know what to ask for?
How do I know when I am in the “will of God”?
But those are the wrong questions.
It’s putting the cart before the horse.

The focus of Jesus' remarks is on the abiding—not the asking.
If you are abiding in Christ, then ask for whatever you wish!
So rather than figure out what we should ask for,
we should seek with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength,
to love the Lord our God.
We must bear fruit.

This may bring discouragement to some of you.
You may look at your life and say “but I’m not bearing much fruit.”
I’m not loving the Lord my God very well,
and I’m not doing a good job of loving my neighbor either!

But remember Jesus's words:
“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”
How do we bear “much fruit”?
Go back to verse 2.

The vinedresser, after all, not only cuts off the branches that bear no fruit,
but also prunes the fruitful branches
so that they might become more fruitful.
The Father wants you to bear much fruit.
So he will prune you.
Anything that gets in the way of bearing fruit will be pruned!
But who does this?
Does the branch prune itself?
No!

Pruning is an artificial method of increasing natural production.
The branch will never prune itself!

The vinedresser prunes the branch,
so that the branch might naturally produce more fruit.
The life of the vine is now your life.
The life of Christ courses through your veins through the grace of the Holy Spirit.
And the Father prunes away all that belongs to your old man,
so that the new life in you
might come to fuller expression each day.

In other words, Jesus is saying the same thing that Paul will later say:
“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
because it is God who is at work in you
both to will and to do for his good pleasure!” (Phil 2)
God is the one who will prune away all that gets in the way of your bearing fruit.
You are called simply to abide in Christ,
to live your life as one who has been grafted into the true vine,

who draws life and nourishment from him.

2. Love One Another as I Have Loved You (v9-17)

Jesus then turns to the source of this life: (verses 9-11)

a. Abide: As the Father Has Loved Me, so Have I Loved You (9-15)

i. Abiding and Obeying: the Fulfillment of Joy (v9-11)

⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* ¹⁰ *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.* ¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

We are called to imitate Christ.

He abides in his Father's love, and kept his Father's commands.

Now we are to imitate him, by abiding in his love and keeping his commands.

Of course, imitating Christ is impossible—in one sense.

We have already seen that we lack the power and strength to obey God.

But, if it is Christ himself who is in us—if we are abiding in him—

then *imitation of Christ* is rooted in *participation in Christ*.

We imitate him by abiding in him.

And notice where all this is going: “That your joy may be full.”

So often we think of obedience as drudgery.

But Jesus says that keeping his commandments is the path to love and joy –

“that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Notice that Jesus is not just talking about a “someday” experience.

Jesus is not saying that “someday” we will find life and love and joy in heaven.

Jesus is saying that we find it *in him* – as we abide *in him*.

Because our participation in the life of the Triune God has already begun!

We have been grafted in to the vine – already, even now,

we have begun to participate in the life of God.

ii. Love Means Dying for Your Friends (v12-13)

¹² *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Jesus then tells us how far we are to go in imitating him.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

They don't understand yet how radical that is,

but Jesus explains it.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.
Do you want to know how to abide in Christ?
Do you want to know how to love him?
Then lay down your life for one another.

Because that is what Jesus did for us!
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!
While we were still enemies, he treated us as friends.

And now he calls us to be friends with him.

iii. You Are My Friends If You Do What I Command You (v14-15)

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, ^[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus has not yet revealed that his disciples will be children of God.

And here he simply calls them friends.

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.

No longer do I call you servants,

for the servant does not know what his master is doing;

but I have called you friends,

for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

You are the friends of God,

because God has told you what he is doing!

Of course, it’s important to see the “if.”

If you do what I command you.

You have the option of refusing the friendship of Jesus.

I tried that once.

I don’t recommend it.

Because I realized as soon as I did it,

that there was no way back from my side.

How does a human being reach God?

After all, as Jesus says in verse 16:

b. Bear Fruit: The Apostles Bear Fruit (You) so that You May Abide (v16a)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide,

The chosen people did not choose themselves!

As we heard from Isaiah, Israel failed to live as the elect people of God.

Israel had produced stink fruit.

Injustice, oppression, and all sorts of wickedness.

They did not abide in God's ways,

and they did not love one another.

But now Jesus has come as the true vine—the elect one.

He has done all that he heard from his Father.

And now he has chosen us to bear fruit for his glory.

The goal of election is good works.

As Paul put it in Ephesians 2:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing;

it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Because Jesus appointed us to bear fruit...

**c. Pray: So That Whatever You Ask in My Name, He May Give It to You
(v16b)**

so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

The one who is abiding in Christ – the one who is bearing fruit in obedience –

doing righteousness and justice –

will therefore ask rightly of the Father.

Asking in the name of Jesus means more than just saying the words “in Jesus’ name.”

It means to ask by the authority of Jesus –

and for the sake of the kingdom of Jesus!

After all, the one who is abiding in Jesus *in the same way* that Jesus abides in the Father,

will have the same attitude towards life as Jesus –

because we are joined to the life of God!

When you begin to think this way, your prayers tend to move away from the “list” mentality,
and become more and more like the prayers you read in the Bible!

¹⁷ *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*