

Title: "The True Vine"

Text: John 15:1-8

Turn with me today to the Gospel of John, chapter 15:1-8.

- We have been preaching through the "I AM" sayings of Jesus.
- Those statements of self revelation where Jesus introduces Himself to us saying,
 - "I am the light of the world."
 - "I am the Bread of life." "I am the Good Shepherd."
 - "I am the Gate for the sheep."

Today in John 15 we come to that place where Jesus tells his disciples, "I am the true vine, and you are the branches."

- So we are off to the vineyard today, my friends.
 - Listen to the Word of God, and let's pray it will be for us a fine wine, reviving our souls.
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*"I am the true vine," Jesus says.

And you know what really struck me this week about that statement?

- It is an "I Am" statement in which Jesus identifies himself with all of us....with all of God's people.

So far we have seen that in all the other "I AM" statements,

- Jesus is identifying himself with God!
- When he says, "I am the Light of the world," or "I am the Bread of Life,"
 - he is revealing himself as something far greater than a regular human.
- When he says, "I am the Good Shepherd," he is revealing himself as the LORD of Psalm 23.

Most of the "I Am" sayings are revelations of the divinity of Jesus.

- Which is why after so many of them, the Jews are ready to stone him to death for blasphemy?
- They say, "You, a mere man, are making yourself out to be God!"
- And they are right. That's exactly what Jesus is doing.

But here in John 15, Jesus is actually revealing a whole other aspect of his person and work.

-Here he is identifying himself not with God, but with Israel, with God's people.

*All throughout the OT, as we saw in the reading from Isaiah a few minutes ago,

-the vine was an image for Israel.

-The gardener was the image for God, as Jesus says here.

God took the people of Israel out of Egypt and planted them in the promised land like a vineyard.

-He watered them, nurtured them, gave them his law, gave them his promises.

-He built a wall of protection around them, and he tended them as a vinedresser tends his grape vines.

-They were his special planting, his special people, his vineyard.

And as Isaiah says, he was looking for good fruit from this Vineyard.

-He had planted it and nurtured it and He was looking for "a crop of good grapes,

-but it yielded only bad fruit."

-He was looking for "justice and righteousness" from His people Israel,

-but got only "bloodshed and corruption."

-He was looking for this vineyard to display his beauty, his splendor, his character,

-such that all the nations of the world might come to Israel and say,

"Wow, if this is what a nation is like that follows YHWH, then I want to follow YHWH, too."

But it never worked like that, did it?

No. The people of God acted just like the nations around them

-They were no different at all.

-They were just as sinful, just as unjust,

-They were just as wild a grapevine with just as bitter a grape as the world around them.

You see, the “vineyard” of God’s people never measured up to the vineyard owner’s hopes.

-The people of God never really “walked in his ways nor lived according to his statutes.”

*But along comes Jesus, and he says, “I am the True Vine.”

-And do you hear what he is saying today?

-I am the one who walks in God’s ways and who lives according to his statutes.

-I am the one who embodies what the people of God were always supposed to be.

-I am the vine that produces the kind of grape that the vineyard owner delights in.

-I am the one in whom you see the life of YHWH lived out.

-“I am the true vine,” Jesus says.

“I am the embodiment of the true people of God.”

Now isn’t that amazing?

-We say that the incarnation is God taking on human flesh in Jesus Christ.

-And that is very true.

-But here we find that there is a very real sense in which the incarnation is also the “people of God taking on flesh in the one person of Jesus Christ.”

That which the people of God were always meant to be is embodied, incarnated, “fleshed out,” in Jesus Christ.

And here is the best part:

* -When Jesus tells his disciples that they are the branches who must “remain in him,”

-he is including them in the “true vine.”

“I am the vine,” he says, “and you are the branches.”

“Remain in me, and that righteous life of the true people of God will be yours by association.”

-My righteousness will be your righteousness because you are connected to me.

-My “walking in God’s ways and keeping of God’s statutes” will be credited to you because you are grafted into me.

You see, those who trust in Christ get included in the life of the true vine by becoming branches of it.

Now my friends, savor that for just a moment.

-Let it sink from your brain down into your heart.

-When God the vinedresser looks at his vineyard,

-if you trust in Jesus and are grafted into him,

-then your branch is part of what vinedresser sees as his choicest vine.

-And your branch is also then part of what the vinedresser will continue to tend and cares for and ultimately harvest for His glory.

-The branch of your little life is now identified with the True Vine of Jesus' life and of all the people of God who have trusted in Christ before you.

You are included in the true vine of all God's people.

-He fulfills all we were ever meant to be and to do, and he represents us before the Father in heaven.

-So now, in Christ, we get to be fruit which is to God's honor and glory.

Now secondly, not only are we included in the true vine as simply being identified as part of the people of God, -but the life of Christ begins to flow in us and through us!

This Vine we have been grafted into is a living organism, -and the life of the Vine flows through the branches and ultimately bears fruit in our lives.

So it's not only that the righteousness of Christ gets attributed to you by association.

-No, the life of Christ is also going to start flowing through your branch and bearing fruit in your experience.

-You will begin experiencing a new and righteous kind of life because Jesus is living it out in you.

Now, if you're thinking, "Yeah right. Where exactly is this new and righteous kind of life I'm supposed to be experiencing?"

-My life still pretty much looks and feels like the old wild vine it has always been."

Well, first off, you are not alone.

- Most of us feel like that quite often because by nature we are wild vines.
- This new life of Christ does not come naturally to us.
- We do not have it in and of ourselves.
- We only get it by “remaining in him,”
 - by trusting not in ourselves, but in him.

And this life of ours is a long process of learning again and again that “apart from him we can do nothing.”

- My friends, we only learn this by stumbling and bumbling along,
 - depending on ourselves again, and making a mess
 - and then giving up on ourselves and leaning on him.

We think we should have learned by now to just start out by trusting in him, but we don't.

- It doesn't come naturally to us.
- We have to relearn the lesson by hard experience again and again.
- That's why we often feel like such failures at this life of discipleship.

But guess what? THAT IS the life of discipleship!

- Learning to trust Jesus is what discipleship is all about.
- Learning to stay grafted into the vine is what it's all about.

And here's the second thing: when the branch stays connected to the vine,

- the growth and the bearing of fruit comes by itself!
- It is simply the result of being connected to the vine.
- You don't make it happen, it just does happen.

So our job, my fellow branches, is not to try harder in the Christian life, but to trust more.

“Just remain in me,” Jesus says.

“If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” it says in v. 5.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish,” he says in v. 7, “and it will be done.

- For it is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

God is the One who is going to bear the fruit in us.

-Our job is just to remain connected to the vine.

-Our job is to remain "in him," to remain "in Jesus."

-And we do this by giving up our self reliance and trusting in him.

So don't go out of here today to try harder on your own to be a better branch and produce a better grape.

-Give it up!

-I mean it. Give it up.

-Get a life, a real life, a righteous life by trusting in the true vine.

He has already fulfilled all that God ever desired of the people of God.

-And he has now offered that life to you free of charge.

-He simply says, "Come. Come attach yourself to me.

-Lean on me. Rely on me. Hope in me. Depend on me.

-For I am the true vine, and you are the branches.

-Remain in me, and I will remain in you."

Now finally, my friends, I know that we would all like to have at least some kind of measure as to whether we are growing and bearing fruit in our lives.

And here I would simply urge you to not try and judge your growth on a daily basis,

-but rather to think in terms of seasons.

We actually have a grape vine at our house that I've told you about before.

* -And right about now, after a long winter that grape vine is not a pretty sight.

-It looks brown and dead and somewhat ugly.

-The branches are not straight and smooth.

-They are all tangled and twisted and in complete disarray.

-If you were to judge that vine on the season just past, you would think that it was a bad reflection on the gardener.

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But just you wait. A month from now, that vine will be covered in leaves with little clusters of grapes beginning to show.

- It will adorn the fence by our garage and look lovely.
- * -And those grapes will slowly grow all summer long and get green.
 - And the growth is imperceptible on a daily basis.
 - But over the course of the season it happens all by itself

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And come fall, they really will look like this, and we will have hundreds of grapes that are purple and ripe,
-and make the best grape jelly in the world.
-So we judge the vine by seasons, not by days.

Do that for yourself as well.

- Look back over the past year, or two years, or five years and ask yourself if you have grown and born fruit.
- Ask yourself, "Am I the same person I was 2 years ago?"
 - Or has Christ been changing me slowly over time?"
- Ask about seasons in your life.
- Because on any given day you may feel like there is no perceptible growth in your life in Christ.
 - No fruit, no joy, no life. Just a tangled, twisted, mess.

Well, my friends, that's when you go back to square one and just remain in him.

- Don't trust in yourself. Don't just try harder.
- Rather give up on yourself, and trust in him more.

And then give it some time.

- He will produce the growth and the fruit in you.
- It's what he does. He is the true vine. We are the branches.

Abide in him. That's what he asks us to do.

Abide in him. That's what I try to remind myself to do every day.

- Literally, every day.
- I tell myself, "Paul, abide in him. Stay connected to Him.
- He is the vine. You are a branch. Just stay connected.
 - And his life will flow in and through you, and the fruit will come.
 - Give it time and the fruit will come.

Let us pray.

