

Sermon for 2 May 2021

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Easter-5: - John Chapter 15: 1 to 8

Exegesis: Last week we meditated upon a gospel that described Jesus as a Good Shepherd. The good shepherd who leads the sheep to righteousness and unites them in one sheepfold. That sheepfold can represent the Universal Church. So, the call from the Good Shepherd was an inclusive call for all to come under the leadership of one shepherd who constitute one flock, regardless of race, gender, age, or social status. It was a call for discipleship and unity under the direction of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Today, the fifth Sunday in Easter, the gospel reading we just heard reflects what Jesus expects from his disciples.

To describe true discipleship Jesus used a metaphor of the vine as He said He is the true vine, and his disciples are the branches, and the God the Father is the vine grower. The branches that abide in the vine, bear much fruit. The vine grower is going to be pleased by the branches that bear much fruit. And the branches that bear fruits are going to be pruned or cleansed by the vine grower to make it more fruitful. At the same time, the vine grower will remove all the branches that bear no fruit, and those withered branches are going to be thrown into the fire and burned.

Interpretation: The author of this Gospel, John the Apostle, presents this teaching after having recounted the feast of the Passover which is described in Chapter 13. The context of this teaching is associated with all the events and teaching that had taken place in the upper room where Jesus washed his disciple's feet, instituted the Holy Eucharist, and foretold Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial.

The way of living a fertile Christian life is symbolically expressed through four characters. The father God as vine grower, Jesus Christ the Son of God as the true vine and two groups of disciples as branches that bear fruit and branches that bear no fruit.

The vine grower is dependent on the vine for its produce, while the vine is dependent on the vine grower for its care and nourishment.

Through Baptism we are grafted into that true vine and become branches of that vine. We become the offspring of Abraham the father of faith. In Christ, we come under the fatherly care of God the Father, the vine grower.

Therefore, just like the branches attached to the vine, the fertile Christian life begins when disciples attach their life to Christ, who is the giver of life.

As different branches are united in a vine, the Christian discipleship is a way of life that is united in the body of Christ.

The Christian discipleship is not a vocation to stand alone, but a vocation to stand together in the body of Christ.

There was a story like this. A Christian motivational speaker was leading a special session for married couples. Most of them were newly married, except for a few. The speaker reminded them that they are no longer two, but one body. Then he paused for a few seconds and asked, "Do they feel they are not two anymore, but one body?"

After a long silence, a couple that recently celebrated their 25th anniversary responded. They agreed that they were one body for the last 25 years, but they still struggle to find an answer for a question, who is the head? He, or she.

But the disciples united in Christ are equal and ought to bear fruit, just as the vine grower expects fruit from all the branches that are attached to the vine.

While Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, Judas was already on the way to destruction and his other disciples would be scattered. So, Jesus reassures and motivates His disciples repeatedly to abide in Him as we read in verses 4 and 5.

Jesus said to his disciples, abide in me as I abide in you. What a great and powerful reassurance that is! Jesus is already abiding in his disciples. It was his initiative to come in to them.

But finding Christ's presence and abiding in him was the choice of his disciples. Jesus made it clear to them, and now it is made clear to us, that no one can bear fruit without him. Dwelling in Christ is the only way to produce fruit.

Fertile discipleship does not end merely in bearing fruit. The branches should stay on the vine forever and bear fruit. They go through the process of pruning or cleansing by the vine grower to bear more and much fruit as the years go by.

Jesus warned his disciples that whoever does not remain in him and bear no fruit shall be removed from the vine by the vine-dresser, and these branches shall be cast into the fire and burned.

This gospel passage is reminding us once again that the disciples have no authority to prune or remove. That authority abides in God the Father. The disciples have an authority which is to abide in Christ and bears much fruit. The God the father is glorified through disciples who abide in his Son Jesus Christ and who bear much fruit.

Application: -

The fruit of our Christian life is the work of God.

Each of us can see the life and work of God in others; in ministry, in love, in commitment and in ordinary daily kindness and compassion.

Each one of us is gifted in some unique way.

We can bear fruit for God in a way nobody else can.

Prayer helps us recognise the fruits, develop them, and offer them in the service of God and God's people.

Can we take a moment to reflect on these questions?

Do we abide in Jesus or are we far from Jesus?

Are we united to the vine that gives us life?

Are we capable of bearing fruit and giving witness?

The father is pruning us, working deep in our hearts to draw us closer to himself in Christ. Are we resisting his efforts?

Let us pray,

Teach us, Lord Jesus, what it is to abide in you and for you to abide in us, and give us a gift of openness to the mighty work of God the Father and help us to bear much fruit.

Amen.