

“Two Options: No Fruit or Much Fruit”

St. John 15:1-11

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SERMON 1950

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Our sermon text is from John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The pharisees thought that they were the ones bearing the fruit. The others were not doing the things which they were doing. They fasted twice a week. They gave a tenth of their income. They made long showy prayers. They were emphasizing the laws of God. If only the rest of the people would work harder.

In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus gives only two options. One, apart from Jesus “you can do nothing,” or two, “he who abides in Jesus, “bears much fruit.” By these words Jesus denied that the pharisees had actually produced any fruit at all. It was shocking to those pharisees who had thanked God that they were not like other man.

Similar to the pharisees’ reasoning, there tends to be this idea that being a believer is one thing, but those who work hard or try harder are able to do more. That is, they can bear “much” fruit. There are the Christians who go to church, but then there are those who lead ministries. There are the Christians who have dinner prayers, but then there are those who go on mission trips. There are those who are baptized and then there are those who are fully alive. Jesus is debunking both the pharisees and our modern-day teachers who have a program and a process and three ring binder to get everyone to produce fruit.

First of all, Jesus makes a definite contrast between unbelievers and believers. Unbelievers cannot bear fruit. I will say it again. They bear NO fruit. Do they do stuff? Yes. Can it outwardly look like something religious? Yes. Does it benefit other people? Yes, it can. However, good fruit is only that which flows from faith. It is only after someone comes to faith in Christ that they are changed. Apart from Christ the unbelievers are withered and dead branches, producing no fruit. But when God connects us with Jesus, the true vine, then there IS the production of fruit. Faith in Christ always produces fruit.

When I speak this way about the believer in Jesus Christ, he begins to squirm a bit. It’s not that the statement is false, nor does that uncomfortableness mean that there is a problem, though the believer thinks that there is. Every believer in Jesus Christ has a sinful nature. Every believer confesses his sins daily just as you did at the beginning of this Divine Service. There is no contradiction. They are not mutually exclusive. The believer with a sinful nature who confesses his sins produces much fruit.

Let me explain. Earlier in St. John 13, Jesus began the Passover by washing the disciples’ feet. St. Peter threw a fit and refused to have his feet washed. Jesus said, (John 13:8-10), “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” When Simon Peter responded, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him,

“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” On the one hand, St. Peter was already bathed and completely clean. He had the cleansing of justification. St. Peter was already a believer who had his sins forgiven. Nevertheless, there is still the need for the washing of his feet. That washing we would describe as the ongoing sanctification of the believer. St. Peter still needed to confess his sins daily and have Jesus wash him up. You might notice that Judas was declared not to be clean at all.

In today’s text Jesus, first of all, lets his disciples know that they are already grafted into the vine. They are already bearing fruit, because that is what believers do. Unbelievers have no faith and thus cannot fear/love God with any of their actions. Believers know that they are saved and thus fear and love God so that they do good works of thankfulness and praise. Believers produce fruit.

In today’s Holy Gospel from John 15, Jesus goes one step further. Jesus makes the point that Jesus prunes the branches which are connected with Him. The believer still needs his daily sins of weakness to be pruned. Our sin is exposed by God’s law and confessed. The absolution is delivered which forgives the believer and sets him free from his sin. In this way Jesus takes the fruit-bearing believers and works in them much fruit.

This pruning action of Jesus is the cause of the fruit. Jesus works in believers much fruit. The result is that all believers are grafted into Jesus and abide in Jesus. All believers bear fruit. **In fact, all believers bear much fruit!** Listen again to John 15:2! Jesus is not speaking of only some believers. All unbelievers are cut off, and all believers are pruned to bear much or more fruit! John 15:2, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” There are not some believers who are pruned and some that are not. All believers are pruned. All fruit-bearing believers are pruned to bear much or more fruit.

Let’s return to St. Peter in John 13. You can’t refuse the daily foot washing and still be a believer. In John 15, you can’t refuse the pruning and remain with Jesus. For us it is this simple. You can’t be unrepentant and abide in Jesus. Believers bear fruit. Believers confess their sins and bear much fruit. Or to say it from God’s point of view, “...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

What is this fruit? Love. We are to abide in Jesus’ love (v.9). His love is intelligent and insightful with motive and purpose. So is our love, for they are not two kinds of love, but the same love. His love abides in us, the result of a new heart which He has created within us. Our love is not the result of a law-driven fear. It is the result of the new desires to thank and praise God for His love and mercy. Jesus says, “As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” We abide in His love when confessing our sins, he prunes us to produce much love. And as I said earlier, this love is not forced, nor is it the works-righteousness of the pharisees. **Our Christian fruit of love is the result of Jesus’ love, which comes from the Father’s love.**

This intelligent and purposeful love, the result of thankfulness and praise, gives our heavenly Father **great joy**. God does not have joy in the unbeliever because they refuse to live in Jesus who is the true vine. They desire to remain separate and lifeless twigs. God does not have joy in the pharisee’s works because they too reject His Son

and try to earn heaven by their works. Both groups fall under the words, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away."

However, what Jesus does for the believer brings Him and His Father great joy. First, He brings the believer to faith, so that he trusts in the free gift of salvation. Second, he prunes all of his believers so that they bear much fruit. These fruits of love bring forth two kinds of joy. It brings joy to Jesus and **that results in joy for us**. John 15:11 says, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Our joy comes from abiding in Jesus, our true vine. We have great joy in God for forgiving our sins. And our joy continues because He prunes away the daily defilements of the sinful flesh so that we bear much fruit. Jesus desires that our joy may be full. Full joy comes from abiding in Jesus.