

Bible Study for Sunday April 28, 2021

Our texts for this Sunday are:

- Galatians 5:13-25
- John 15:1-11

Galatians 5:13-25 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. 14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

How are the fruits of the Spirit more than mere niceties? Do you think that they are radically counter-cultural in their true form? How so?

Do you find it exciting or empowering to know that God's gift of the Holy Spirit is like a seed planted in you?

Why is it important to distinguish between fruit being the evidence of our relationship with God rather than the evidence of our salvation?

What fruit do you most recognize in yourself? Which fruit do you have most trouble being cultivated in you? What would others say?

Read John 15:1-8 15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

When this passage is read in the context of the chapters which immediately precede it—Chapter 14, which emphasizes loving Jesus, and Chapter 13, which emphasizes loving each other—we understand that love is the fruit which is expected of the branches. In other words, our true life is a life that is connected to and draws its energy, growth, and vitality from love. Does hearing this make the actions (pruning & cutting away) in this text easier?

According to our text, what needs to happen for a plant to bear fruit? Who grows the fruit? Does the fruit grow by accident, do we grow it ourselves, or is it the result of an intentional effort on the part of a gardener or farmer?

It has been said that “fruit-bearing” will reveal who the disciples are. What does this statement about bearing fruit *revealing* disciples rather than *making* disciples mean to you?

What do you think is the most important “fruit” for today’s Christians to bear? Read Galatians 5:22-23

- Ponder the fruit you have borne. In what ways does abiding in (sticking with) Christ make fruit possible?

In his commentary on John, Matt Carter helpfully asks, "What should followers of Jesus expect if God's commitment to our fruit-bearing is greater than our commitment to comfort?"

How could Jesus’ teaching on pruning apply to a church community? How do you see our community being pruned—or do you?—in order for us to bear more fruit as a community? How are we modeling our fruitfulness for others? How can we be better?

We have talked a lot about pruning and cutting away, but this text also has a lot in it about being connected. Remaining connected isn’t just a desire; it has become an actual industry. Below are some interesting statistics from Forbes Marketing concerning cell phones and smartphones:

- 91 percent of adults who own smartphones keep them within arm’s reach.
- 90 percent of text messages get read within three minutes of delivery.

Do you think (overall) that people feel more connected or less connected as humans?

- How have text messaging, Facebook and Instagram changed the way you stay connected, present ideas and thoughts as compared to face to face interactions?
- What are the best ways to stay connected to someone?

Jesus made a point of regularly staying connected to God, removing Himself to a quiet place for prayer and communion with God. This constant contact with God—this dwelling, this abiding—is what made Jesus who He was.

- How do you attempt to stay in constant contact with the vine? How might connectedness to community be helpful and supportive in your connectedness to God?
- How might that action help fruit grow in you?

When have you attempted to go it alone, only to discover over time that you were withering, like a branch that has been cut off from the vine?