

John 15:1-8
Easter 5; May 3, 2015

I am the Vine and You are the Branches!

In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine that is known as "*The Great Vine*." It is about 240 years old and has but one root which now has grown to about 12 feet around it. It is protected by a long glass greenhouse. Despite its age, this one vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Even though some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem and root, they bear fruit because they get their nourishment and strength from that one main vine.

This morning, Jesus promises to do the same for us. He is the "true vine" that lovingly brings life to each of the branches. Last week, we saw Jesus' love for the sheep as he describes himself as The Good Shepherd. Today we see his love once again as he gives us life. Let us that a look at the love that God shows us in Jesus' words: "**I am the vine; you are the branches.**"

Even though these words of Jesus are very familiar to many, it is the occasion of when Jesus speaks them that really show his love for his disciples. It was Maundy Thursday evening. All the events that happened in the upper room are now completed. He has just told his disciples: "**Come now; let us leave.**" As they are making their way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sees some vines in the dark. He pauses with his disciples and says: "**I am the vine; you are the branches.**" Even though they didn't fully understand what was all about to happen, Jesus did. Think of the words of Jesus as some of his final words to his disciples who he loved a great deal. If you were on your death bed, what would be some of the last words that you would want your children, your spouse, your grandchildren to hear.

These disciples were soon going to feel so alone. Their world was about to be turned upside down. Jesus would be betrayed in a few hours. He would be tried. He would be crucified. His dead body would be placed in a tomb sealed by a stone. Even though he would soon come out of that tomb, he soon was going to leave them alone as he would ascend to heaven. So, Jesus says to them: "**I am the vine, you are the branches.**" *You're not alone, I will always be with you giving you the strength that you need.*

When you look at the words of this text, what words seem to jump out right at you? What picture does Jesus want you to remember? Branches? Vine? Those are important yes; but they are not the focus of Jesus' words. The word that Jesus wants us to remember is "**remain.**" Eight times in eight verses he uses that word. There are other words in our text that sound more exciting than "**remain.**" Fruitful. Bearing Fruit. There are words that are more threatening. Fire. Burning. Withering. But remain?

We don't always want to *remain* home when everyone else is doing something. We may not always want to stay in the basement when that several storm is coming through. It is more exciting to see what is going on. We want to be part of the action. But when that tornado is coming, *remaining* in the basement is much safer. A massive storm was about to his Jesus' disciples. More storms were to come. As they would go through them, Jesus wanted them to *remain in him*.

We can remain in him because at some point in our lives, we were planted in Christ. We were grafted to that vine. For many of us, that was done in the water of baptism. Others, you were planted in Christ when someone shared the message of Jesus with you. Through faith in Jesus, you were connected to the vine of Jesus.

Are you a person who has *connections*? If you have connections, you may be able to see and do things that others can't. I remember many years ago watching the launch of the Space Shuttle *Discovery* from the air force base surrounding Cape Canaveral. We knew a pastor who had a member who could get us on the military base to watch the launch. That launch was the first launch after the *Challenger* disaster. Even though the launch pad was about 6 miles away, you could see it across the flat ground in front of us. When that shuttle went up, the ground shook. The sky lit up. The cheers of the people went up. It was great to have connections. You and I have the greatest connection in the world with Jesus. Nothing compares with the connection that we have with Jesus. "**Remain in me, and I will remain in you.**"

This past week, as I was checking some news stories online at NBC news, there was a headline that caught my attention. It read: [“Brain-Dead Nebraska Mom Karla Perez Kept Alive to Deliver Baby.”](#) It is the heart wrenching article. Let me try to read just the first couple of sentences: *“A brain dead Nebraska woman was kept on life support for nearly eight weeks so the baby she was carrying could survive, medical officials said. Baby Angel — weighing just 2 pounds and 16 ounces — was delivered earlier this month, according to the Methodist Health System. It said Angel's delivery was the first of its kind in the U.S. since 1999. Methodist Health System said a team of more than 100 doctors, nurses and staff kept Angel's 22-year-old mother Karla Perez alive for 54 days — just long enough to deliver the baby via cesarean section.”* Doctors are now *“cautiously optimistic”* that the baby born on April 4 will continue to live. What a sacrifice that family gave so that this child could have life. I can't even imagine all the emotions that family is going through. Yet, it is a remarkable story of life for that child.

Jesus' life is greater than the life that the body of that young mother gave for her daughter. He gives life to everyone who is here today. Without the nourishment of the vine, we can do nothing. Jesus says: **“Apart from me you can do nothing.”** Oh, do we need his life! Recently, I heard someone say: *“The real cause of death doesn't show up on a death certificate. The real cause of death is sin.”* Those words struck me. I haven't thought of death like that. It also means that if Jesus takes away sin, then death isn't all that terrible is it; because instead of being cut off by God and thrown into the fire, we remain connected to him even for eternity. Then those words of Jesus really have meaning: **“I am the vine; you are the branches.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you.”**

The pictures that I saw online about “The Great Vine” in London look pretty neat. Yet, apparently there use to be 6,000 visitors a day to look at it, it has become mostly forgotten. In Christ, we are part of a vine that is older than the age of this world. We are a part of a vine that will never forget us. We are a part of a vine that will continue to nourish us until the day we join him in heaven. May we give thanks that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Amen.