

**John 15:1-8**  
**Easter 5; May 2, 2021**

As Joshua stood before the walls of Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "**Are you for us, or for our enemies?**" (Joshua 5:13) And he said, "**Neither,**" he replied, "**but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.**" Joshua fell on his face to the ground and asks: "**What message does my Lord have for his servant?**" **The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.**

Joshua had just taken over as leader of the Israelites. He had led them safely across the Jordan River and into the promised land as God, yet again, miraculously parted the waters. They were ready for battle. They trusted God with all their being. God had kept his promise. They were confident that God was for them. It's for that reason that the Commander of the Lord's Army answer is so shocking. "**Neither,**" he replied, "**but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.**" What kind of an answer is that? He gives Joshua a simple answer: "*No.*" Or at least that is what it seems.

If this were the only information we were given about God, there would certainly be cause for anxiety and concern. Why fight for a God who isn't for us? Why believe in a God who doesn't care about us and yet demands our loyalty all the same? But that's not all the information that God gives us. This Commander was the Lord himself. He had come to do so much more than just prop up one side or the other. He wanted them to know that the Commander of the army of the Lord has now come. They had nothing to fear because He was now here.

At this moment in John's gospel, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death. He has spoken of His betrayal, predicted Peter's denial, and now teaches His disciples one last time. In a few days, he would die on a cross. They were about to face things that they could not even imagine. Yet, not only was Jesus preparing his disciples for his death, he was also preparing them for his life: His resurrected life. In these words, Jesus offers His disciples a promise that He will live and dwell in them. He wanted them to know that the Commander of the army of the Lord has now come and would not leave them alone.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, John tells us that God had done something incredible: "**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**" (John 1:14) These men had seen firsthand what that meant. They had seen Jesus assure a woman at a well in Samaria that he had come to forgive her sins. They had seen Jesus cry at the death of a close friend. They saw Jesus walk on water and calm storms. They had seen him do miracles that only God could do. They had listened to Jesus' words of peace and forgiveness. They had seen what these words mean: "**I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**"

Branches have no life of their own. Their life flows from the vine. So, too, we have no life of our own. Our life comes from Jesus. His resurrection from the dead has revealed that He is the source of all life. Though we die, we shall live. He has defeated death for us, and nothing can now separate us from His love. But the life He gives is not just life after death. No, it is life now in the world. As Jesus says to his disciples: "**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**" (John 10:10) Forgiveness, peace, fullness, joy... all of these flow to us from Jesus. This life flows through us to fill this world with his gifts.

Not only does God want fruit from his branches, he wants more fruit from his branches. "**Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.**" Pruning sometimes hurts, doesn't it? Peter knew something about this. Jesus had predicted his denial. Yet, Jesus had also promised him that "**when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.**" (Luke 22:32) Through Jesus' pruning, Peter learned the limits of his strength, and he learned just how big God's love for him was.

Paul knew something about this. He battled a thorn in his flesh. The more he struggled with that thorn, however, the closer he came to Jesus. He learned what God had meant by those words: **“My Grace is sufficient for you.”** It would lead him to confess: **“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”** (2 Cor. 12:9-10) These men that Jesus was talking to here in our text would also learn how God’s pruning would bear more fruit in their lives as well.

You see, branches get their power from the vine. The vine gives the branches the power to say no to sin. When that happens, even more fruit begin to appear in our life. The branches job is to receive. It’s the vine’s job to give. Jesus gives to you all that you need to produce even more fruit in your life. It is his Word that produces in you a bumper crop of love, kindness, patience and all kinds of other fruit.

The disciples would need the life that only God could give. We need the life that only God can give. It is only on the cross where we can fully understand what the Commander of the Lord’s Army fights for us. He’s not only fighting for us, he’s fighting for this world. It is in the resurrection of Jesus we see the hope that only the vine can provide. Trust these words of Jesus: **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** God grant it. Amen.