

**“Get to the Point!”**

*“I and the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser” John 15:1.*

Get to the point! Please, just get to the point. Found yourself thinking this lately? Have you caught yourself mumbling this under your breath? In all honesty, I know it’s something I struggle with and I’d venture to guess nearly all of us do. Get to the point!

There are so many circumstances that bring this phrase out of us. Listening to politicians ramble back and forth on never ending issues. Hearing commentators attempt to entertain with their witty and random insights. Smiling through preachers’, teachers’, bosses’, etc. extra verbiage that doesn’t seem to connect with the main idea. Putting up with that polite, midwestern, long-winded request because people can be too shy to just come out and ask for what they want. Slogging through your families’ lengthy retelling of their experiences all the while wondering what does this really have to do with me. These examples and so many more situations bring this phrase out of us – get to the point!

And I think what we so often mean by this phrase, ‘get to the point’, is that we just want to know how all those words spoken impact us! Are we being asked to do something? Or is our insight and advice needed? So, in many ways, ‘get to the point’ becomes the nicer way to say, what do you want from me? The truth is, that in a world that struggles to listen, a world that we very much mirror, we try to shortcut to the action items that pertain to us and cutoff everything else attached as if it didn’t matter. As if, it was merely fluff.

I’m sure we have our reasons for why we do this. Best construction, we’re really motivated to help out and fix a need. Yet some days, we’re just too tired to process everything else connected to the request. But most days though, the motivation to have others ‘get to the point’ stems from selfish impatience as we idolize our time and desires so much that everything else seems to just get in the way. With these motivations, what we really mean to say is this, “Get to the point because I have better things to do! What do you want from me? Don’t you know I’m busy?”

Sadly, this way that we so often treat each other is even more so how we treat our God. How often do we come to the weekly worship service wishing things would move faster and ‘get to the point’? Or maybe that Bible class we feel obligated to attend seems to drag on without a main point in sight! This reality and attitude are also easily reinforced now in the age of online services. No longer do we have to suffer through boredom, we can literally fast forward to the point and discard everything else we find as useless.

Perhaps one of the more challenging places that we deal with this ‘get to the point’ struggle is with the weekly readings. With factors like length and our familiarity to the passages or lack thereof, we quickly can find ourselves skimming through the reading looking for what this has to do with me right now in this moment. Our patience wanes as these ancient words feel like they are growing increasingly ancient with every second it takes for them to be read. Then our actual response to these words goes something more like this, “Come on God, get to the point, what do you want from me?” Oh whoops, I mean, “thanks be to God!”

Every weekend we can certainly fall into this trap, but this weekend’s reading from John 15 seems to have great potential for this to happen to us. Jesus’ language is fairly familiar to us. If you’re connected to a Lutheran school this passage likely has been the theme for the entire school year. The metaphor isn’t too complicated for us to grasp and so it’s not hard for us to try and cut to the bottom line. What does God want from us? Well the final verse from our text seems to make it clear, Jesus says, **“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”** (*John 15:8*).

In our haste to have these words applied to us immediately, our takeaway is usually a very self-centered, Law-motivated understanding of what God's Word is telling us. Jumping right to the end of this passage, levels a burden and goal that we can't accomplish on our own. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus clearly tells us that we can't bear fruit on our own. But rushing to 'get to the point' leads us to more abruptly cutoff and disregard who Jesus is and what He has done. Our desire to 'get to the point' really is a desire for us to know what we need to do not what God is doing.

There's a great irony when our desire of 'getting to the point' really means what do you want me to do God? As we jump ahead to the spots that sound like actions we need to accomplish on our own, we actually find ourselves heading down a road that further and further disconnects us from Jesus, the true vine. Simply put, our focus on our work easily leads us to miss, cover up, ignore, etc. the work that God is doing to connect us to Himself.

Jesus is the true vine and as the true vine, He is the source of the fruit that is expected from His followers, the branches. Even the work of pruning doesn't rest on the branches, but on the vinedresser, a.k.a. God the Father, as Jesus tells us. So, the bearing of fruit and burden of proof of being Jesus' disciples isn't ever work we do on our own, but rather work that God does in and through us for His glory.

We have an amazing example of this truth in our reading from Acts 8 this weekend. We actually heard how Christ the vine connected a branch to Himself in the Ethiopian eunuch. Using His Word and His servant, Philip, the Holy Spirit connected the eunuch to the good news about Jesus and His wonderful gift of baptism. The Holy Spirit created fruit and an abiding relationship with this individual apart from this individual's efforts. God brought His Word. He brought Philip. He brought water. And by these means, He connected this Ethiopian to Himself for His glory and purpose.

Even today, here and now, this process stays the same. Christ is the true vine that continues to be our source of fruit. As Jesus connects to us through Word and Sacrament, as He pulls out of us prayer and praise, He is building an abiding relationship with us! The beauty and comfort of what Jesus reveals to us is that our assurance that we are connected to Him and He to us, rests not on constantly looking at our potential fruit, but on Him, the true vine. Focused on Him and the work He accomplishes, we know that the expected fruit and burden of proof of discipleship will follow.

So as branches connected to the Jesus, the true vine, we no longer have to rush to 'get to the point'. For Jesus, our true vine, is the point from beginning to end. From the moment we enter this space to the moment we leave, we are getting to the point because Jesus, our true vine, is at work in and through us. The words we hear, speak and sing in worship are all getting to the point that Jesus our true vine has connected Himself to us and receiving His gifts He abides in us and we in Him. Even the longest winding trails of Bible study are getting to the point because Christ is at work producing fruit. And like with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, even the conversations with our neighbors are places where Christ is able to produce fruit of an abiding relationship in Him.

Truly, God is getting to the point every single moment of our lives. Daily, He seeks to connect with us so that we might produce the fruit He anticipates. He can and does use every experience and encounter we have to further make His point in and through us. He is the vine, we are the branches and abiding in Him we bear much fruit. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan