

Date: December 11, 2022

Series: *A Christmas Christmas!*

Title: *Jesus: The True Vine*

Text: John 15:1-17

Preacher: Mark Adams

Have you ever seen pictures of dogs and owners who over the years end up looking and even acting alike? Here's a few examples. And this is my favorite. I share all these because one day Jesus told His first followers that the ONLY way---they can learn to look and act like Him.

It's in verse 15 of today's text when Jesus said: ***"I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."*** Or---and this is my paraphrase, ***"I am the vine you are the branches. If you abide or remain in Me and I in you---you will do the things I would do. People will recognize you as My follower."***

Before we read the REST of this morning's text, let's look at the setting. Jesus and His disciples have just finished the Passover meal—the Last Supper. In John 14:31 Jesus says to them, ***"Come, let us leave"*** and they did. They exited the upper room and walked through the city of Jerusalem heading for the Kidron Valley and the Garden of Gethsemane. As they did, they no doubt went through the temple and passed by the door that led to the Holy of Holies.

That door would have STOOD OUT because it was decorated with an impressive sculpture of a giant golden vine that wrapped all around the door frame.

This is a depiction of this vine by Ritmeyer Archaeological design. This vine was to remind worshipers of the nation of Israel—which the Old Testament repeatedly pictures as God's vine or God's vineyard. Listen to how Calmet's Dictionary describes this special vine-covered door:

"In the temple of Jerusalem, above and round the gate, seventy cubits high, which led from the porch to the holy place, a richly carved vine was extended as a border and decoration. The branches, tendrils and leaves were of finest gold; the stalks of the bunches were of the length of the human form, and the bunches hanging upon them were costly jewels. Herod first placed it there. Rich and patriotic Jews from time to time added to its embellishment. One contributed a new grape, another a leaf, and a third even a bunch of the same precious materials. This vine must have had an uncommon importance and a sacred meaning in the eyes of the Jews. With what majestic splendor must it likewise have appeared in the evening, when it was illuminated by tapers!"

Well, I think it was as Jesus and the eleven remaining disciples passed this famous vine that He stopped and gave this particular statement. As He stood in front of this huge vine sculpture He said, ***"I am the TRUE Vine and My Father is the Gardener."*** (John 15:1) This was a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 1:11 where it says, ***"And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots."*** The disciples were familiar with this prophecy and others like it so I'm sure all conversation stopped at this powerful statement—because the force of His words were, ***"You all know how Israel is pictured as a vine that is meant to produce refreshing fruit for this lost world. Well, I am the fulfillment of all that symbol suggests."***

Okay—with that in mind, follow along as I read our text. We're looking at John 15:1-11, 16 where Jesus says,

John 15:1-11, 16

1 – “I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Gardener.

2 – He cuts off—or lifts up—every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 – You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.

4 – Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

5 – I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

6 – If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 – If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 – This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.

9 – As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love.

10 – If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love.

11 – I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

16 – You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name.

At this point I’m going to invite (8:30) Tom Cox (11:00) Byrd Family to come hang this morning’s Chrismon. As you can see it’s a chalice used to hold wine---the fruit of the vineyards that were all across the nation of Israel. Thank you (8:30) Tom Cox (11:00) Byrd Family!

When we talk about “*abiding in Christ?*” In my mind, where you ABIDE is where you STAY. To use some almost-contemporary slang, “*abiding*” is where you “*hang*.” At least I THINK that’s still contemporary. Maybe some of you teens can HANG WITH ME a bit after the service and let me know if I got it right---you know....GUCCI...I hope you like my “fit”---and you don’t think I’m being too CHEUGY.

In any case, for a Christian to be a growing Christian—a believer who enjoys the inner wisdom and power Jesus makes available he or she must constantly “hang” with or “abide” with Jesus. The NIV helps us better understand what we’re talking about by translating this phrase, not as “*abide*” or “*hang*” but as “*REMAIN*.” Jesus says, “**REMAIN in Me.**” So basically, abiding is learning to remain in the presence of Jesus throughout the day. It’s kind of like when Sue is cooking in the kitchen and I’m chilling in my recliner. She says, “*Come be with me in the kitchen.*” I say, “*I can’t really cook.*” and she says, “*I know but I just want you with me while I do--come be with me.*” I consider it a compliment that after 43 years of putting up with me—Sue still wants me to hang with her!

Now, of course, if you are a Christian, you are always in the presence of Jesus. Through the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus is WITH—or rather—WITHIN us always. The problem is that sometimes we forget to acknowledge His presence. In essence we “*stay in our recliners.*” We ignore Jesus’ presence.

Think about it—In this fast-paced county of ours we go through out day blazing about at breakneck speed, moving from one crisis to the next—draining ourselves of peace and joy---until finally at the end of the day we collapse in exhaustion.

Well, in this text Jesus is telling us we don't have to live that way. We don't have to face the crises of life on our own strength. We don't have to solve the difficult dilemmas of life on our own brain power. We don't have to go through anxiety or depression-filled days alone. No—we can go through every moment of every day—acknowledging Jesus' presence and asking for His guidance and power. He is always with us--always within us. We can enjoy His guiding, comforting, empowering presence—WHENEVER we want to.

Think about that for a moment.

Imagine how much different your life could be if you included Jesus in every activity of the day.

Every event would become sacred. I mean, there's nothing spiritual about washing your face or making a bed or driving to work or turning on a computer or answering a text or taking a test or playing a sport for your school. But each of these things can become sacred events that add a special depth of meaning and power and peace to our lives---when we acknowledge the fact that we perform them in the presence of Christ—enjoying His all-knowing guidance.

In January 2008, a story made the rounds about a 15-year-old girl in Australia named Demi-Lee Brennan. Brennan became the world's first known transplant patient to change blood types from O negative to O positive, taking on the immune system of her organ donor. At first the doctors thought someone had made a mistake, because it's always been assumed that a change like that can't happen. Now they say she's a *"one-in-six-billion miracle."* The blood stem cells in Brennan's new liver invaded her body's bone marrow, taking over her entire immune system. She now has an entirely different kind of blood—blood that welcomes life, rather than carrying death. *"It's like my second chance at life,"* Brennan says.

Well, something similar happens to us when we learn to abide in Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus, through the power of His blood shed on the cross, He takes our death and in exchange gives us life—abundant life—a life of eternal significance. In fact, He Himself comes into our hearts and SHARES LIFE with us—helping us to see things we never saw before—understand things we never understood before. As Paul puts it, ***"It is Christ in you the hope of glory."*** (Colossians 1:27)

And this glory is not just in the future when our bodies die. It's not just the glory of Heaven. You see, being saved means far more than eternal life when you die. It means an eternal caliber of life in the here and now. This is an important principle for us to grasp because abiding in Jesus' presence—walking through life with Him—asking His input—listening to His still small voice---this abiding is the key to REAL life—meaningful life. Think of it this way. The key to a good marriage is communication and it's the same in your relationship with Jesus. I mean do you want to have a dynamic spiritual life? Spend time alone communicating with Jesus. Talk to him. Learn to listen. Do it all the time. As much as possible, pray without ceasing.

By the way, the journal Psychological Science published a study that shows that when people think about God--their brains respond differently in a way that enables them to get through setbacks and overcome mistakes. This study is further proof of the fact that when we abide with Christ our lives work more effectively and more efficiently than ever before. In fact, that's the focus of this message. In the time I have left I want us to talk about how we benefit from abiding in Jesus—the TRUE VINE.

(1) Our lives become more PRODUCTIVE.

Look at verse 5 where Jesus says, ***"He who abides in Me, and I in him, BEARS MUCH FRUIT."***

Jesus is saying that if we learn to ABIDE IN HIM, our lives become fuller—more productive. We begin to experience the FRUIT that only comes when we tap into the power—the force—of an ongoing relationship with the Spirit of Christ. I mean, “hanging with Jesus” enables us to have more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control in our days—and because of that every part of our life “blossoms.

Our careers—our jobs—are more productive. We become known as the best employees—the ones who consistently do the best work. We become the best students—the best athletes. With Jesus’ help—we can do so much more than we could do on our own.

Marian V. Liataud shares the story of how, seven years ago she started a business. She writes:

“I prayed diligently about the decision and sensed God's confirmation to move forward. Because of my inexperience in retail operations, I depended heavily on God for wisdom and direction. Between the first time I caught a vision for this venture and the day we opened our doors, I prayed every step of the way.

Then on opening day, customers lined up around the building. With pounding heart and sweaty palms, I became acutely aware of the fact that the success or failure of this business rested on me. And, for the next four years, I ran the store as if this were true. Instead of praying for God's wisdom or listening to the counsel of trusted advisors, like my husband, Dan, who was also my business partner, I relied on my own understanding. I simply was too busy and preoccupied to spend time reading my Bible. And when I did make time, I found myself re-reading the same passage over and over and never grasping the words. Daily preoccupation over my work took the place of daily quiet time with God. I discovered how true Jesus' words were when He said,

‘I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.’

The longer I skimmed in my spiritual life, the further I fell from the vine. And the further I fell from the vine, the more all my efforts proved fruitless. Making decisions apart from God and Dan started to have a snowball effect that eventually led to the demise of our business—and nearly our marriage. Looking back on those four years, I know now what was at play: apart from Christ, I could do nothing. Instead of remaining in Jesus, as he instructs us to do, I ran on ahead without Him.”

Marian is right—ABIDING in Jesus makes every part of our lives more productive. When we REMAIN in Him we put ourselves in a position for Him to bless us. And the reverse is true. Not ABIDING—refusing to invite Jesus into our days—our jobs—our marriages—our friendships—this is why so many of us are unproductive. It’s why we are weak and powerless. It’s why we fail to get anywhere in life.

You may remember that on February 10, 2013, a fire broke out in an engine room of the Carnival cruise ship, *Triumph*. The fire knocked out the ship’s power, leaving the vessel drifting in Gulf of Mexico currents. The more than 4,200 passengers and crew were left in limbo. The lost power made it impossible to operate the flush toilets, keep cool in the un-shaded waters of the deep sea, and preserve and cook all the perishable food on board. Passengers reported long lines for food, shortages of fresh water, illnesses, and widespread boredom. Many passengers slept in hallways or outside to escape the odors and heat below decks. CNN dubbed the *Triumph* “the cruise ship from Hell.” I remember seeing the camera views from news helicopters that circled the ship—seeing passengers waving—asking for help. The ship’s loss of power wasn’t just a tragedy for the passengers. Carnival expected to lose hundreds of millions of dollars due to this incident. And apparently, Carnival learned their lesson. In June 2013 *Triumph* set sail once again, but this time it was

outfitted with new emergency power capabilities. Carnival knows that when the power goes out, the party is over.

Well, many of us have learned this lesson as well. Experience teaches us that we run out of spiritual power because we fail to acknowledge Christ's presence. We try to live the Christ-life on our own resources—and that is always a recipe for failure. Plus—when we don't bear the fruit of the Spirit of Christ—people don't recognize us as followers of the Christ. When we don't manifest love and joy and peace and patience and gentleness and kindness and self-control—people don't believe we are believers. You see, your FRUIT shows—PROVES—where you've been abiding. It indicates where you get your strength and wisdom and insight.

And this is not something you can fake. In 1927 the director Cecil B. DeMille cast British-born actor H. B. Warner as Jesus in his famous silent film *King of Kings*. Warner, who 19 years later played the druggist in *It's a Wonderful Life*, was kept on a short leash during the filming of *King of Kings*. Cecil B. DeMille was concerned that any behavior by the lead actor deemed inconsistent with the image of Christ would result in negative publicity for the film. As a result, DeMille enforced strict measures to ensure that Warner kept up a good Jesus-image (or what DeMille thought would be a good representation of Jesus). Both Warner and his co-star Dorothy Cumming (who played Mary, the mother of Jesus)---had to sign agreements that barred them for five years from appearing in film roles that might compromise their "holy" screen images. During the filming, Warner was driven to the set with blinds drawn, and he wore a black veil as he was delivered to the set. DeMille separated Warner from the other cast members, even forcing him to eat alone every day. Warner couldn't play cards, go to ballgames, ride in a convertible, or go swimming. Unfortunately, the regimen of rules and regulations didn't make Warner more holy. Instead, all of the pressure to be more Christlike without having the power or forgiveness of Jesus seemed to drive Warner over the edge. During the production of *King of Kings*, rather than act more like Jesus, Warner merely relapsed into his addiction to alcohol.

This is because you can't be Christ-like—you can't bear spiritual fruit—on your own. You need Jesus IN you. This is what Jesus was referring to in verse 8 when He said, ***"This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples."***

So to experience the BLESSINGS of the Christ-life—to be known for your love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, and self-control—you have to abide with Jesus. You have to draw your strength and world-view from time spent with our Lord. This is how to have a truly abundant—productive life.

BUT—Jesus reminds us here that if we are to reach our fullest potential when it comes to fruit-bearing, God has to PRUNE us from time to time. Jesus says He is the "Vine-dresser" and when He said this He was referring to pruning. I mean, all grape growers know the importance of pruning to increase production. Sometimes they wander among the vineyard pinching off a growing tip---so it will not grow too rapidly. Sometimes they cut off a foot or two of new growth to prevent the loss of an entire shoot. Other times they lift up a branch that is growing too close to the ground to prevent mold and allow it to grow properly. Thinning the grape clusters themselves enables the rest of the branch to bear more fruit and fruit of a better quality. To the untrained eye doing all this looks cruel and wasteful, but to the experienced eye it is the only way to grow healthy, delicious fruit.

Well, the same is true of the Christian life. God has to prune us in order for us to grow and produce fruit for His kingdom. Now—our Father's pruning process can be painful---but it's always beneficial. Remember David's

words in Psalm 119? He said, ***“Before I was afflicted, I went astray...but it was good for me to be afflicted—PRUNED—so that I might learn Your decrees.”***

Sometimes the pain of pruning comes because of our sin. Other times it is simply because we are bearing fruit but God wants us to bear more. I mean, there are times He allows trials and hardships to come our way so as to deepen our reliance on Him. The fact is God’s pruning is always good for us. It always takes the sinful parts of our lives away so that what is left is more like Jesus than it used to be. As we allow Him, God pulls us away from destructive relationships.

He cuts away hurtful behavior and sinful qualities like gossip and lust. In this way He sculpts us more into the image of His Son.

Steve Brown writes:

“I grew up in a neighborhood where I had twenty fathers and twenty mothers, and I couldn’t get away with anything. When you looked up the street, there were beautiful maple and oak trees that grew on either side of the street. It was a beautiful place for a tree house. It was a place where kids loved to climb and swing. You could hide from your parents up there and they couldn’t see all through the thick foliage. Every few years the tree men would come and whack off the big limbs. I used to complain about what had happened to our beautiful trees, and the man who was in charge told me, ‘Steve, do you really like the beauty of the trees? It’s the cutting that causes the beauty.’ That’s true for trees and for Christians. That’s how God works in our life. He prunes that we might bear fruit. Abide in Christ and you will grow. You will be pruned, but you will grow.”

James 1:2 says, ***“Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.”***

Remember, pruning is necessary to growth—and God loves us enough to do what is necessary for growth to happen. Plus—His hand is never closer than in those painful times of pruning! Through this pruning, God is the PERFECTER of our faith. As Hebrews 12:5ff says, ***“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves---and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son---no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace...”***

Abiding with Christ—including His times of pruning—makes our lives more productive, so if you’re going through a pruning time—thank God for it!

(2) **Our prayers are more POWERFUL.**

Look at verse 7. Jesus says, ***“If you abide in Me, and MY WORDS in abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”*** Now—many people misunderstand this promise. They think Jesus was saying, the sky is the limit when it comes to our prayer requests—that we can ask for anything and get it---but with this immature mindset our conversations with God become nothing more than a series of “gimmee’s” —gimmee this God—gimmee that God. And often the things we ask Him to “gimmee us” are not the kinds of things we need.

Plus, this concept of prayer turns God into nothing more than a genie in a bottle. But of course, that wasn't Jesus' intent. He was saying that our most meaningful prayers come from HIS WORDS abiding in our thoughts. You see, when we abide in Christ, our desires become what they should be. Our desires become HIS desires. When we pray, we ask for HIS will to be done.

Think of it like this.

We talk like the people we hang with—abide with. Their words become our words. It's kind of like being a transplanted Southerner. I know many of you are. Uncle Sam brought you up here to “yankee land.” And now you talk more like a Yankee but when you head south to visit family—it doesn't take many hours before “YES” becomes a two-syllable word again and your drawl returns. We talk like the people we HANG with—ABIDE with. So, when we don't abide with Christ and instead abide in the world—well, we pray like the world—selfishly and materialistically. When Christ is not the center of our lives, we want what we shouldn't want; we don't want what we should. When we're not abiding in Christ, we pray for the wrong things.

But abiding in Christ causes us to experience change from within. Our desires are completely overhauled. When we ABIDE in Jesus we experience an empowered prayer life as we learn to pray more deeply for the right things—blending God's desires with our own. When HIS WORD abides in us—those same kind of WORDS come out in our prayers.

Let me put it this way. A child might ask for candy at every meal, but a grownup knows better. And, abiding in Christ helps us to grow up such that we learn to pray rightly and then as verse 16 says, God will give us, *“whatever we ask in His name.”* Listen—people who pray with power—are people who abide with Christ day in and day out. I remember C.C.'s story of how when he was a little boy—about 12 he was diagnosed with Sickle cell anemia. Of course, the entire family was very upset by this news. But, instead of fretting, C.C.'s grandmother left their home in Dothan, Alabama and spent the entire night deep in the swamp praying that he would be healed. The next morning she left the swamp and told her family, *“That child no longer has Sickle Cell Anemia.”* And when he was reexamined that was the case. The anemia was gone—and it's stayed that way since.

We've covered a lot this morning and in closing I want to ask you a question. As a Christian, does abiding in Christ as I have described it appeal to you? Does it make you yearn for a more productive—ABUNDANT—life? Do you wish your prayer life could be more powerful—more like a REAL conversation between you and God Himself? Are you lonely for the blessing of kindred-spirit friendships? Well, if one or more of these questions applies to you—then I would suggest that you simply make a commitment to abide in Jesus from here on out. Bow your head where you are seated or come to the altar and pray and re-commit your life to Jesus' lordship. He promises that if we open the door of our lives He will come in—so do that. Invite Him into that part of your life where you tend to leave Him out—commit to ABIDE with Jesus on the job...in your marriage...wherever. If you don't have a church home and God is leading you to join Redland, come forward and ask to become a member. We would love to have you in our church family. And—if you don't know Jesus—invite Him into your heart and life today. We're going to stand and sing now—and if you have a public decision to make, come and share it with me or one of the other pastors.