

Scripture:

John 15:1-17

“Grafted together in Christ’s love.”

This morning in John’s gospel we have a powerful image of what it looks like to be a member of the household of God.

The branches of a tree --- fitting for us as we have our lent and Easter tree.

Branches are forever growing --- and stretching ---- reaching out into the world around them --- sharing shade and often food --- a place to rest for birds and well--- beauty.

And of course branches are connected to larger branches ---- and then limbs ----- and of course eventually the trunk --- which then sinks down deep into roots --- unseen anchors ----- the foundation and support for each and every tiny little branch as it reaches out further and further.

This is the image John shares.

This is what it means and looks like according to Jesus ----- to be one of His disciples.

But there’s more here than just we are connected to Jesus the way a branch is connected to a tree.

As true as that is ---- there’s more here.

One theologian put it this way --- referring to this passage.

“Like a vine extending life to its branches ---- God extends the prolific power and life of the resurrection into those who remain connected to Jesus.”

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That’s essentially what this passage is all about.

The reality that the prolific power and life of the resurrection is extended to all who remain connected to Jesus.

Life --- vitality ---- eternal life --- life abundant ---- life in all its fullness ----- is extended to all who remain connected to Christ.

Luke Timothy Johnson begins his book “Living Jesus” ---- this way --- saying-----

“It makes a big difference whether we think someone is dead or alive.”

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And well --- let’s face it --- it does.

Obvious --- yes --- but also helpful --- particularly in the context of John 15.

If someone is alive you can call on them --- and if they’re dead you can’t.

If someone is alive you can sit with them by the fire --- share coffee --- a glass of wine ---- a puzzle --- and so on ---- and if they’re dead you can’t.

You can visit someone who is alive ----- not so much after they pass.

Obvious.

Dead people don’t suddenly appear on your doorstep --- with a smile and flowers on a tough day.

Dead people are no longer available to us in the same way as those who are alive.

And so ----- “It makes a big difference whether we think someone is dead or alive.”

Well it also makes a big difference whether or not we are connected to the living Risen one.

“Like a vine extending life to its branches ---- God extends the prolific power and life of the resurrection into those who remain connected to Jesus.” ---- alive in Jesus.

The image of the vine speaks to us not only about being connected to Jesus - ----- but about just how close Jesus wants us to be.

Close enough that His very lifeblood can flow into us.

You can't paint a more intimate or close knit image than branches and trees.

The prolific power and abundant life of the resurrection is extended to us only as we are intimately connected to Jesus ---- there's no such thing as a lone ranger when it comes to Christ.

And of course it doesn't just stop with being connected to Christ.

Once we are connected we are also then called ---- and equipped ---- to extend this power and life --- the saving presence of Jesus Christ --- with everyone we know.

A tree never stops growing --- it branches continually reach out in new growth.

And if you've ever stood at the foot of a mighty redwood --- or oak ----- or sequoia ----- it's humbling and powerful.

You stand at the foot at one of these massive trees and get a profound sense of just how much a tree truly does just keep on growing ----- forever reaching out to the world around it.

Indeed John's gospel speaks not just of a tree but of a vine.

And like a tree --- perhaps even more so ---- a vine is forever reaching out into the world around it --- wrapping itself around everything it encounters.

And that is precisely what we are called to do in Christ --- and that's precisely what this passage is all about ----- reaching out to those around us.

And the methodology is simple ---- love.

The kingdom of God is grown --- expanded --- and shared ---- salvation in Christ is grown ----- expanded ---- and shared ----- simply by loving others.

The movement in our gospel passage is of abiding --- pruning ---- and bearing fruit.

Abiding ---  
 ----- pruning ----  
 ----- bearing fruit.

Staying connected --- cutting off what hinders and harms ---- and thereby being faithful and ---- “productive” --- fruit bearing.

To abide in Christ means to constantly be renewed in our commitment to Him --- to stay closely connected to Him ----- to live in Him ----- or more appropriately --- to allow Him to live in us.

And so the image of a vine or tree --- assists us --- by providing a way to visualize our delicate and at the same time powerful interconnectedness in Christ.

That’s abiding.

So now pruning ----- cutting off that which hinders.

Many times there are things in our lives --- practices --- approaches ---- attitudes ---- and sometimes even stuff --- possessions ----- that hinder and get in the way of our staying connected to Christ.

And so they must be cut off --- peeled away sometimes --- and then disposed of.

And again ----- the image of the vine or tree --- assists us and paints a helpful picture --- as we prune a tree so we prune ourselves --- practices --- habits --- attitudes.

Abiding --- pruning ---- and now bearing fruit.

Bearing fruit.

Simply put ---- showing forth the glory of the Lord --- sharing the love of God in Christ Jesus --- that all might taste --- see ---- and enjoy it.

But for all this talk of vines --- and branches.

Abiding ---- pruning ----- and bearing fruit ----- we can still easily miss the very heart of this passage.

The few words that the whole passage evolves around ---- and finds its meaning in are these.

Verse 3 ----- “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

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A branch or vine doesn't grow because of any effort of its own.

It doesn't extend itself into the world ----- sharing its shade --- fruit and so on ----- by some great and profound effort of its own.

It extends out into the world sharing its beauty ---- because of the sap ----- the life that flows through its veins.

Because of the other branches and the trunk and the roots that push nutrients out into it.

“Like a vine extending life to its branches ---- God extends the prolific power and life of the resurrection into those who remain connected to Jesus.”

Just as the branch already has all it needs to grow by virtue of it being connected to the larger branch ---- the still larger branch --- the limbs ---- all the way back to the trunk ---- and then deep down into the roots --- without any personal effort of it own ----- so it is that we have all we need to remain vital.

And like the branch we are vital --- virile ---- alive ---- not because of anything we have done ----- but because of what God has done in for us Christ.

It has already been done for us --- the battle is over ----- war is over --- we win ----- everybody wins ---- because of Christ.

Evil loses ---- God wins --- God saves --- Jesus saves ---- love abides --- hatred crumbles.

Part of what ----- “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” ----- means is ----- we are already clean because of God’s Word -- - God’s living Word ---- Jesus Christ.

Our cleanliness --- or acceptability ---- our rightness with God --- our “deservedness” to be loved by God ----- is incorruptible.

God has already told and showed us in Christ just how much He loves us ---- we’re clean ----- we’re good --- all is right once again --- if only we accept -- and respond.

That’s the heart of the gospel today.

“You did not choose me --- but I chose you .....” ---- Jesus says in verse 16 of our reading today.

In other words you’re good enough.

I have chosen you ----- it’s not about your worthiness or not --- whether you’re good enough or clean enough --- or whatever enough ---- faithful --- true ---- honest whatever.

“You are already clean --- and I have chosen YOU!” ----- Jesus says to us today.

As disciples of Christ we are chosen by God to extend the incorruptible life of the resurrection into the world.

Just as branches receive their life and sustenance from the vine and then extend the life of the vine further out into the world --- so are we to receive life from Christ and then extend that very same life out into the world.

As disciples of Christ we are chosen by God to extend the incorruptible life of the resurrection into the world.

That's what it means to be grafted together in Christ's love.

We're chosen --- we're good enough --- God loves us ----- and we are to share this same love with others.

Because they're good enough ---- because we're all good enough ----- thanks to Christ.

Life can be full of ugliness --- corruption ---- greed ----- and violence.

It can make you sick to pay attention to the news ---- "religious" battles in too many parts of the world --- greed ---- violence --- corruption.

Sometimes I listen to the voices around me ----- what people concern themselves with ----- it can really be sad --- people can be pretty petty and self absorbed ---- trampling down on the human spirit instead of uplifting each other.

But flowing in through each and every person ----- by virtue of all of us being created in the image of God ---- is the very life of God --- the very grace of God.

Unfortunately too often we let stuff get in the way of it ---- or we cut ourselves off from it.

One commentator I consulted this week said that this passage from John's gospel reminds us that the demands put on us are everywhere surrounded by grace.

"The demands put on us are everywhere surrounded by grace." ----- yes --- but I think it's even deeper than this.

Not only are we surrounded by grace ----- but the very power and influence of grace ----- resides within us all.

Just as the sap in the tree --- is within it --- pushing new growth --- so it is with the grace of God.

It's deep within us ----- flowing in and through us ----- pushing and inviting us in Christ inspired ways.

Luke Timothy Johnson is right ----- as obvious as it may be he's right ----- "It makes a big difference whether we think someone is dead or alive."

And so it makes a big difference whether or not we are connected to the living Risen one --- or not.

It makes a big difference whether or not we allow the grace of God to flow in us and through us.

God's grace is incorruptible ---- of this there is no question.

We can't corrupt God's will ---- it's far too powerful to be degraded by just people.

But we can inhibit it a little bit ---- if we throw junk in its way we can kinda mess it up for a minute or two.

A vine or tree confronted with a brick wall is inhibited a bit --- something is in its way ----- but before it grows up and over and all around whatever obstacle is in its way.

So it is with grace.

Grafted together in Christ's love ----- anything is possible.

Obstacles ---- yes ----- sometimes.

But the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ are incorruptible.

Abide ----- prune ----- bear fruit.

We're all at various stages in these movements.

Sometimes we're a bit of all three.

When we're grafted together in Christ's love ---- we're always abiding a bit --- pruning a bit --- and even by the grace of God ----- bearing a little bit of fruit too.

He has after all chosen us ---- we are after all clean enough ---- and strong enough ----- and good enough --- thanks to Him.

The challenge isn't to try to make ourselves --- good enough ----- or clean enough --- or worthy enough.

That's already taken care of --- don't waste your time.

The challenge is to remain in Him --- abide in Him.

The branch remains vital not by any great effort of its own.

The branch remains vital by simply allowing the sap to flow through it.

We remain vital ---- and faithful ---- Christlike ----- not through any effort of our own.

We remain vital ---- faithful --- fruitful -----Christlike ---- by allowing God to work in and through us.

Like branch to limb to trunk to root --- so are we connected to Christ.

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”-----Christ says to us.

The branch is there through no effort of its own --- it's the roots and the trunk that give it its life.

We are here --- we are saved --- we are loved --- through no effort of our own ----- it is God's doing ----- it is Jesus Christ.

Praise be to Him.

He the resurrected and Risen one.

The great root --- from ---- through --- and in whom --- we live and move  
and have our being.

Amen.