



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 6, 2012
5th Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: [John 15:1-8](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Acts 16:11-15](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 67](#)
Second Lesson: [1 John 3:18-24](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 15:1-8](#)

Remain in the Vine

Pruned
Fruitful

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Do you enjoy repeating yourself over and over? If you are a parent talking to a child, do you really get excited when you have to say the same thing to them the 4th time, the 5th time, the 6th time? Does that kind of make your day? This is great! I get to say the same thing over and over to my children. Isn't that wonderful? Now they'll really listen and learn.

Did you notice when I read the Gospel to you before how many times Jesus said remain? Take the words of LeBron James, "not five, not six, not seven," eight times he said remain or some form of remain. Did you ever stop and ask yourself why? He repeats it so much he must be trying to get it through the thick heads of sinners like you and me, right? He must be trying to say "This is pretty important. I'm saying it eight times." That's four times for each ear you have. Think about that for a minute.

When you remember that Jesus spoke the words I read to you on Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room, a few hours later after singing some Psalms, they would go out to the Garden of Gethsemane. He would go off by himself to pray and he would say, "You guys stay here. Watch and pray with me. This is vital." Then he would come back and find them sleeping. He'd do it again and he'd come back and find them sleeping. Then the mob comes with their spears and swords and their torches like he was Frankenstein or something and takes him away and arrests him, and they all run away. "Remain in me. It's vital that you remain in me."

The day after this he would be dead in the grave. Then 40 days after this, after he was dead and in the grave, he would ascend into heaven. They would see him going up into the clouds. The clouds would hide him and they'd never see his body again until they got to heaven.

In that context, remain in me, remain in me, remain, remain, remain, remain starts to make sense because their eyes were going to tell them he is gone. "We can't remain

in him anymore. It's not like we could go ask him a question like we used to. Show us the Father. That will be enough for us." They can't go say that anymore. So he's telling them to remain in him because he knew just how vital it would be when his visible presence was gone that they remain in him and in his words so that they would know that even though his visible presence was gone, he was with them and he would bless them with the Spirit, and they would be able to do more than they could ask for or imagine because God remained in them as they remained in his Word.

That truth is no less vital for them than it is for us today. As we go through our lives, there are a lot of things that lead us to wonder, where is God? Why does he let this happen? Why does he let that happen? How come I'm struggling with this? Why am I struggling with that? Life should be easier. Life should be better. Life isn't what I thought it would be. Jesus' answer to all those times when we question him are "Remain in me. Let my words remain in you, and you'll get through it all."

Today he talks to us about remaining in him and he tells us to remain in him pruned by the Gardener, the Heavenly Father. As we remain in his words and as the Father prunes us, we will be more and more fruitful. That will be a blessing to us, but it will also be a blessing to others. God is a God of order. That's his plan.

He talked to them about gardening in such a way that I think it was pretty clear for them to understand. I'm not much of a gardener. My wife does all that. I'm not much of an arborist. I'm not much for trees and all that, but I kind of get the picture. You have to remain in the vine for the branch to be fruitful. That's pretty straight forward and simple.

In Minnesota we had a nice raspberry patch. I loved raspberries. Still do. It was great when you would go out there and stop the lawnmower or just walk out there and grab a handful of raspberries and eat. That was pretty nice. But it was a long walk to the back corner of the lot there, so it would have been a lot better if I could have just cut off a branch, put it on the kitchen table and walk downstairs every morning and pick some new fresh raspberries. I didn't even bother to try that because that wouldn't work now, would it? If you cut the raspberry branch off and it's not getting it's nourishment anymore, it's going to shrivel up and die. I guarantee you my wife would not be happy with a dead branch on the kitchen table. It's pretty straight forward.

It's the same way... "remain in me, let my words remain in you." He says "You're already connected to me. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." They already believed that he was the Messiah. They weren't real clear yet on what that all meant, but they knew that he was the One that was promised. They believed in him, and by faith in him, they were attached to the vine. So now he is saying "remain in me even after I'm gone. Remain in me and let my words remain in you."

As a Christian, you and I have a part of us that dearly loves to remain in Jesus. There's no better thing for our new self than to spend time getting to know our Savior better. There's a part of us that delights in it, thrills in it, rejoices in it, just sits at the feet of

Jesus and marvels that he loves filthy rotten sinners like we are. We just sit in awe of his love and his glory and how he puts that love to work on our behalf. We rejoice that he took away every last one of our sins, not because of who we are, but because of who he is. There's a part of us that does that. Yet, there's a part of us that wants nothing to do with that. We still have that sinful nature.

Because we have that sinful nature, the sinful nature wants to go its own way. God has laid out pretty clearly in Scripture there are certain things where he says, "Don't do this. That's going to be a problem in your life." He doesn't say that to us because he's trying to keep us from fun. That's what our sinful nature thinks. He says it to us because he knows it will be a blessing for us in our lives as we do what he says.

He lays it out real clearly in the Commandments, right? Honor your father and mother; it may go well with you and all that. Submit to those in authority. As a kid growing up, I knew life would be better if I did what dad said. I still didn't always do what dad said. Did you have the same experience? I remember one time after dad had found my brother's belt instead of the little one I brought him, standing in the corner, tears running down my cheeks, thinking "that's it! I'm not going through this again. Never again am I disobeying my father! This isn't worth it." All my intentions didn't change it. I still disobeyed. If I would have obeyed better, I would have been more blessed. I would have learned more. I would have listened more. I would have been better equipped to face things down the road because God's intention was that I would have learned more from my father than I did. But I thought I knew better.

That doesn't ever really change, even when we grow older, does it? God says, "You shall not commit adultery. Use my gift of sex and marriage the right way." We think we know better. We think God is just trying to keep us from all the fun in life, and if I have that affair and chase after someone else besides my spouse, it's not going to hurt me. God's just trying to keep me from fun. Then when a marriage is torn apart and there's a pain that seems like it's never going to end within a family, then we realize God knew what he was talking about.

There are times when you and I, because we are sinners, are going to chase after things that are going to be a problem. That's why God says that those who are connected to him he prunes. The Gardener, the Father, prunes. He prunes us by leading us to see our sins through the Law. To see that even though we love our God and want to serve him, we don't always do it. We need to prune. We need to cut off those branches that are growing, not from being connected to Jesus, but they are growing from my own sinful nature. I need to prune them. I need to repent of them, turn away from them and say "Jesus, for the sake of your life and death, forgive me for this foolishness. Forgive me for this wickedness. Forgive me for this sin." Then I am pruned because I know that God has taken away my sin. He does the same thing for all of us who are connected to him.

I don't know what a tree feels, but I have to believe a tree doesn't think it's really fun when you start cutting it's branches off. Sometimes pruning hurts. Sometimes when

God has to use one of your fellow believers to come to you and say “What you are doing is wrong. You need to turn away from it. You need to turn back to Christ.” That doesn’t feel good, but it’s necessary. It’s necessary to be God’s pruning shears at times and point people back to God’s Word. There are times when we need to have people do that to us at times. We might not like it, but we need it.

When God does this, whether through his Word as we read it ourselves, or whether through our fellow Christians, and we see our wickedness and we turn away from it, it has the same affect that it has on a tree. When you cut off all the branches that aren’t going to produce the fruit, that are just taking energy away from the tree so that the tree can be more fruitful, that’s what happens. When God uses his Word or his fellow believers proclaiming his Word to prune us so that we turn away from our sin, we become more fruitful.

“Remain in me and my words remain in you, and you will produce much fruit. Apart from me, you won’t be able to do anything. If anyone does not remain in me, you’re like a branch that is thrown away and withers.” Those are just thrown in the fire. But if you remain in him and his words remain in you, he says you’ll be very fruitful.

The fruit would be the things we do out of love for God, according to his will, the good works that we do because we love God and want to thank him for the gift of salvation. Those things that we do then are a blessing to ourselves and to others. The fruit that we would grow then I would think would also have to be the fruit of the Spirit. In [Galatians 5](#) God tells us about the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.” The more we remain in Christ, the more the Spirit will produce that fruit in our lives.

Look at that list and think about that list. Did you ever wake up in the morning and say to yourself, “I hope I’m less patient today. I hope I’m less kind. I hope I’m less self controlled. I really need to just let loose and let my inner hulk roar.” No, we don’t find ourselves blessed when we do that. When we give into the sinful nature and do that, life gets worse. We suffer the consequences of our foolishness.

I look at my life, and I’m guessing you look at your life and say “Life would be a lot better if I was more loving, if I was more patient, if I had better self control. Life would be better if I was more faithful to my God. I’d really like more peace in my life, not less.” That becomes pretty obvious, doesn’t it. The more time we spend with Word and Sacraments and see the love our God has for us, the more he gives us the fruit of the Spirit. The more we have the fruit of the Spirit, the more we live it in our lives, and the more we are a blessing to one another; the more we serve God in our kingdom and extend his kingdom, as we both live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Then we carry out the task he has given us to grow and to go to make this incredible news that our Savior loves us and he attaches us to him simply because he is love. That’s the good news that we get to share. That’s the good news that we get to live. So don’t make him say it a ninth time. Just remain in him because it’s a wonderful blessing. Amen.