

To God Alone Be The Glory

Let's talk about dancing. Not the kind people do when music begins to play but the kind of dancing people do with their words. Sometimes it's called spin or posturing. It's what people do when they don't want someone else to think badly of them. An everyday example might go something like this. You're in a group spending the day together. It's nearly noon. Someone says, "I'm hungry, let's get some lunch." You say, "Okay, but not pizza. I hate pizza." Everyone else says, "But we like pizza." So you say, "I could eat pizza." You just did the dance, the 'Please-don't-think-bad-of-me' dance. People who care what others think of them can get really good at this dance.

You are getting to know Jesus better and better through his Word. As you read the Bible more regularly at home, the Holy Spirit is working in you to be less impulsive and more considerate, more patient, kind, loving, faithful, self-controlled. And have you noticed that you're now doing less of that word dance because, well, you care more about what God thinks of you than about what people think of you? You keep going back to the Lord daily saying, "Lord, thanks for washing away all that I have done to displease you. Make me more like you. I want to please you." You may have also noticed that, as you strive to please the Lord, people

enjoy interacting with you more than they used to. As the Holy Spirit has been maturing you spiritually, you may have found yourself feeling the need to dance for people less and less. Fellow believers may even be dancing for joy with the Lord, because his grace and goodness are manifesting themselves more and more in your attitudes and words and actions.

That's really what Jesus is talking about in John 15: knowing Jesus better and better so that we behave in ways that are more and more pleasing to God. No matter how much you care what people think of you, you can see that 'caring what God thinks of you' is far more important. So what does God think of you? Jesus will tell you in a moment, but first listen to Jesus explain where he's coming from: ¹*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off 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.* Next Jesus proclaims what God thinks of you. ³*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.* Through God's Word, you have had all your dead branches pruned away. If you have tended grapevines or even tomatoes, you know what Jesus is getting at. I got to tend some grapevines one year. What an interesting creation God has made in grapevines! I learned that grapevines love to be pruned back hard.

First-time pruners always feel like they are “killing the grapevine by cutting off too much.” But when the grapevine gets growing in the spring after being properly pruned, wow, can it really put out leaves and grapes!

You and I are branches sticking out of Jesus, and he’s the vine. We’re connected to Jesus because he chose to connect us to himself. He says: ¹⁶*You did not choose me, but I chose you.* Now listen to Jesus’ beautiful invitation to us believing branches: ⁴*Remain in me, and I will remain in you.* Did you ever hear a more beautiful invitation? Our Savior Jesus wants us to remain in him. If we do, he’ll provide us with nourishment through his Word. That’s how he will remain in us: through his Word.

Jesus’ beautiful invitation comes with a scary promise for those who are tempted to stop listening to God’s Word. ⁴*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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* ⁶*Those who do not remain in me are like branches that are thrown away and wither; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

Alright, we’ve heard the warning. Let’s

just say we’ve taken the warning to heart and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we have decided to heed Jesus’ invitation to be in his Word regularly. Did you hear what is going to happen through us if we remain in Jesus and he remains in us? Much fruit! If you’ve ever done any gardening, you know how joyous it is when your plants begin to produce fruit. If you have grapes, you know how wonderful it is to peak under the grape leaves and see those luscious bunches of sweet purple delight. And the smell! Ripe grapes smell even better than a fresh bottle of Welch’s grape juice. *That must be how the Lord feels when he hears our prayers or witnesses us encouraging someone else to trust the Lord and wait patiently a little longer for God to act. That must be how the Lord feels when he hears us singing his praises, or notices that our appreciation for what Jesus did has prompted us to give him some of our time or bring him generous offerings. Much sweet-smelling fruit, indeed! That’s what God works in those who remain in Jesus. People can see this fruit hanging on you, fellow believers—praise be to God!

Jesus says, ⁷*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* Children sometimes like to test this passage: “Does this mean God will give me a million dollars if I ask him?” I like to respond, “Well, does your desire for a

million dollars come from 'Jesus' words remaining in you' or from 'your wanting to spend money to please yourself?'" See, when Jesus' words remain in you, you will ask for those things which God is already willing to give. Consequently you will always get them. "Lord, help me be more kind and gentle and thoughtful, like you." "Yes!" Jesus answers, "Remain in my Word: I will give you what you asked, and more."

Jesus says, *⁷This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* You know what Jesus means by 'disciple,' right? Think of the snow we had last week. It's fun to watch a parent walk through the snow, with their child following behind trying to put his/her feet right into the footprints of the parent. That's what it means to be a disciple: to put our feet into the footprints of Jesus' teachings. When we stay connected to Jesus through his Word, we bear much fruit, just like Jesus who produced bunches and bunches of fruit that were pleasing to our heavenly Father. When we bear much fruit, being as kind and loving and firm as Jesus, we show we are following in his footsteps. This glorifies God—which is our ultimate purpose in life!

Sometimes joy is in short supply. There doesn't seem to be a lot of happiness in the lives of so many people. I wonder if

that's why comedians and sports are so much appreciated. People love to laugh or cheer—anything to distract themselves from their troubles. There's working out, shopping, eating, drinking alcoholic beverages—nothing wrong with these in and of themselves. But when someone is seeking happiness not from God but from exercise or purchases or food or drink or game, one tends to exceed one's limits, which can lead to injuries, or too much stuff, or maybe debt, or too much weight, or tipsiness, or laziness. Sometimes people will even turn to perversions as a shortcut to happiness. But all these paths to happiness double back to the unhappy heartaches people are trying to get away from. *Dear friends, Jesus has a much better plan. First he washed away all our sins by his death on the cross. Then he teaches things like: "Remember those 10 Commandments? Figure out how to apply them in everyday life. Willingly obey them, and you will have genuine happiness." This is how Jesus puts it in today's sermon text: *⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* Joy is some of that 'much fruit' that Christians get to bear.

Love is another fruit of faith. But the love of most is growing cold in these last days of earth. I don't see as much hospitality like I saw when I was growing up, or consideration, or respect. It's as if people are afraid of each other now. I guess that's understandable with crime and the coronavirus and all the civil unrest. But as branches in our Jesus-vine, let's be better at loving than the rest of the world. Jesus says: ¹²*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* But Jesus is cool. He's not like the leaders of terrorism: they think suicide bombings are good, but instead of carrying out the miserable missions themselves, they get young people to do the suicide bombings for them. Jesus is against all forms of suicide. Jesus is for love. But he doesn't just get us to do his loving for him. He led the way. ¹³*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* That's what Jesus did for us on the cross. He died so we could live forever with him.

Now he says, ¹⁴*You are my friends if you do what I command.* ¹⁵*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* What a great thing to be known as: Friends of Jesus. We friends of Jesus

know everything we need to know for eternal life.

And with the Holy Spirit's help we produce much fruit. Jesus says, ¹⁶*I ... appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.* Regular fruit never seems to stay ripe longer than a few days. Leave it alone too long and it spoils. But Jesus says that when we obey him, we are producing fruits that will last. Think how true that is of one particular kind of fruit God leads us to produce: our offerings. Our offerings result in the gospel being proclaimed through us at St John's, and throughout the world by our missionaries, and in the next generation through the future pastors and teachers we are training at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and our Lutheran high schools. It's through our offerings that God brings about this gospel proclamation. The gospel is the tool through which the Holy Spirit converts unbelievers into believers. Everyone who is brought to faith in Jesus gets to have eternal life with us. Eternal life for others—that's more fruit that lasts and never spoils! Praise be to God!

This chapter of the Bible, John 15—wow!—it has lots of wonderful things to say about being a Christian. LORD, HELP ME and each of your followers TO BE A JOHN 15 CHRISTIAN.