

**Connected**  
Series: His Last Day  
John 15:1-11  
April 3, 2022

Welcome again to worship.

I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin, or if you are online, grab your spiritual journal, your Bible, and turn to John 15.

This year during Lent, our series comes from a meme:

Sometimes I joke about what I'd do if I had one day left to live. Eat junk food, go crazy, etc. Today it hit me: Jesus knew. And He washed feet.

In this series "His Last Day," we are looking at some very important chapters in the Gospel of John, chapters 13-16. They are often called the Upper Room Discourse, for Jesus taught His disciples in the Upper Room the night before He was crucified.

Let's look at John 15:1-11 from the New International Version:

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.<sup>1</sup>*

If I had to give you a one sentence synopsis of this passage, it would be this:

**The first and most important relationship to maintain is with Jesus.**

We as humans are naturally self-centered. We want to decide what we will base our lives on: some person, some belief, some cause, some hobby. There are those who live and breathe sports or politics or social justice or business or entertainment. I mean, why have we been so focused on some slap on an awards show that hardly no one watches anymore? It knocked Ukraine off the headlines. How stupid is that? A first world problem; maybe a fake world problem. We are focused on a slap when women and children are dying in Ukraine.

But Jesus says the first and most important relationship to maintain is with Him.

In order to illustrate its meaning, Jesus used the allegory of the vine.

The vine was grown all over the Holy Land, as it still is. It is a plant which needs a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be got out of it. The ground has to be perfectly clean. It is sometimes trained on trellises; it is sometimes allowed to creep over the ground upheld by low forked sticks; it sometimes even grows round the doors of the cottages; but wherever it grows careful preparation of the soil is essential.

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<sup>1</sup> John 15:1-11 (NIV)

It grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is necessary. So luxuriant is it that the plants are set in the ground at least twelve feet apart, for it will creep over the ground quickly. A young vine is not allowed to fruit for the first three years and each year is cut drastically back to develop and conserve its life and energy. When mature, it is pruned in December and January.

It bears two kinds of branches, one that bears fruit and one that does not; and the branches that do not bear fruit are drastically pruned back, so that they will drain away none of the plant's strength. The vine cannot produce the crop of which it is capable without drastic pruning—and Jesus knew that.<sup>2</sup>

The vine was also known as an emblem of Israel, just as the eagle is the emblem of the United States. Over Herod's Temple was the symbolic decoration of a great golden vine.

Jesus used the same imagery of the vineyard by applying it to the relation between Himself and His disciples.

Merrill Tenney in his book "John: The Gospel of Belief"<sup>3</sup> lists five points of resemblance between the vine and this relationship with Jesus. These are 5 things we need to have a meaningful life.

**First, the Right Stock.**

The first half of Verse 1:

*I am the true vine...*<sup>4</sup>

The first essential in planting a vineyard is to have the right stock. Every garden center guarantees that the plants they sell are true to their packaging. You don't want to buy tomato seeds and find out when they've grown that they are pepper seeds.

There are many false claims out there about what is true. In fact, you can't hardly read the news without shaking your head at the craziness that is out there.

The word for "true" in verse 1 means "genuine" or "real," Jesus claimed to be the one true stock. He is the only One we should connect ourselves to. Simon Peter rightly said to Jesus only "...You have the words of eternal life."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus alone is the source of the heavenly life of the spiritual vine.

**Second, the Right Gardener.**

Back to Verse 1:

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.*<sup>6</sup>

Every vineyard must be pruned by an expert.

The other day, the company that spreads fertilizer for us on our lawn – the first to green up in our neighborhood this year, thank you very much – came over to prune our bushes. We always have them out each spring because honestly, we don't know what we are doing.

So, I was outside talking with them about what Myra wanted. I said, "She wants them pruned down."

"How far," they asked.

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay's Daily Study Bible, John 15:1.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill C. Tenney. John: The Gospel of Belief, An Analytic Study of the Text. William Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1976; pp 226-229.

<sup>4</sup> John 15:1 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> John 6:68b (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> John 15:1 (NIV)

“Um, pretty low, I think.”

The guy pointed, “I can see where they were pruned last year. Fine, we’ll do that again.”

Thing is, I couldn’t see what he was seeing. I’m not the right gardener.

The gardener had to know how and when to prune and fertilize the vine, so that it would produce the maximum crop.

The spiritual vineyard is tended by God Himself, who knows best how to train and develop the personality of His followers. Everything He does in your life is for a purpose.

### **Third, the Right Culture.**

Verse 2:

*He 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.<sup>7</sup>*

In grape farming, it is called viticulture. Viticulture is the cultivation and harvesting of grapes which deals with the series of events that occur in the vineyard. One of those is pruning. In pruning a vine, two principles are generally observed: first, all dead wood must be ruthlessly removed; and second, the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood harbors insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, to say nothing of being unproductive and unsightly. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into fruit.

The vineyards in the early spring look like a collection of barren stumps; but in the fall they are filled with luxuriant purple grapes. As the farmer wields the pruning knife on the vines, so God cuts dead wood out from among His saints, and often cuts back the living wood so far that His method seems cruel. Nevertheless, from those who have suffered the most, there often comes the greatest fruitfulness.

We would prefer God to save us, then leave us be. But He can’t if we are to be what He wants us to be. He must prune us, and sometimes, that hurts.

A boulder of stone is nothing more than that, until the artist chips and removes the excess stone to reveal the statue within.

God is pruning each and every one of us from the ordinary to the masterpiece within. Therefore, we need to understand that when we are being pruned. The right culture reminds us of the need for pruning.

### **Fourth, the Right Contact.**

Verse 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.<sup>8</sup>*

The King James says:

*Abide in me, and I in you.<sup>9</sup>*

The word “abide,” which occurs ten times in this passage, means the maintenance of an unbroken connection. It speaks of the necessity of a constant active relationship between the believer and the Lord if the resultant life is to be productive.

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<sup>7</sup> John 15:2 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> John 15:4 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> John 15:4a (KJV)

One of the ways the devil used the pandemic is to separate people from each other: families, friends, even congregations. Keep them from being together, and they would be alone to face to torment of his evil ones.

It is easy to stop abiding in Jesus. We slip away ever so gradually. We stop going to church; we stop reading our Bibles; we stop praying. Soon, we have drifted away.

SAILING GUY.

Jesus said, "Abide in me." "Remain in me." He was telling us to maintain the right contact, to hold fast to Him, and not let trials turn us aside from the truth.

And the promise is that He will abide in us. We will receive every help and influence from Christ that our souls require, in order to preserve and save them to eternal life.

Two things are absolutely necessary to our fruitful walk with Christ:

First, that we continue closely united to Christ by faith and love, and live in and to Him.

And second, that we continually receive from Him the power to be fruitful. For as the branch, however good in itself, cannot bear fruit from itself, through its own juice, which it has already derived from the tree, and can be no longer supported than it continues in union with the parent stock, neither can we, unless we abide in Him. As the branch partakes of the nature of the tree, is nourished by its juice, and lives by its life, so we must be made partakers of His Divine nature.<sup>10</sup>

John 15:5 says:

*Without me, you can do nothing.*<sup>11</sup>

No life. No influence. No discipleship. No spiritual growth. No fruit. Nothing.

**Finally, the Right Fruitage.**

Verses 5-8:

*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. 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. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*<sup>12</sup>

Fruit, more fruit, much fruit is the divine order. Growth brings increase of fruitfulness, and the more mature a believer becomes, the more may be expected of them.

Fruitfulness appears in obedience, which is a sure mark of the believer as disobedience is a mark of the unbeliever. And what is this fruit? Our Sunday School children know it: the fruit of the Spirit:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*<sup>13</sup>

When we are connected to Christ the vine, these qualities are produced in us. We have love toward others, joy within one's own heart, spontaneous obedience to Christ, and people will see Jesus in us.

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary, John 15:4

<sup>11</sup> John 15:5

<sup>12</sup> John 15:5-8 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 5:22-23a (NIV)

Those who do not produce fruit are thrown into the fire. It is not a far stretch to understand His meaning. He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>14</sup>*

There are three ways in which we can be useless branches. We can refuse to listen to Jesus Christ at all. We can listen to Him, and then render Him a lip service unsupported by any deeds. We can accept Him as Master, and then, in face of the difficulties of the way or the desire to do as we like, abandon Him. One thing we must remember. It is a first principle of the New Testament that uselessness invites disaster. The fruitless branch is on the way to destruction.<sup>15</sup>

That’s why it is so important to remain in Him. You will not make it out of this life and go into eternal life without being fruitfully connected to Him.

Cut off from Jesus, and you have no right or title to Him or to His salvation.

If you are connected to the vine, God is going to do whatever it takes to cause you to bear fruit. God will cut you and prune you and trim you and chop you. He is not content to let you stay on the vine bearing little fruit. God is ruthlessly determined to shape you into something much better and more beautiful than you are right now. He is determined to make you more like His Son Jesus. The only way that will happen is through cutting away the parts that are dying so you can grow more and more healthy. God’s commitment to your fruit bearing is greater than your commitment to comfort. God will do whatever it takes for you to bear fruit.

The difficulty you’re going through right now may well be an act of kindness on God’s part. He loves you, and He is shaping you into something more than you are now. Shaping takes a sharp blade and produces pain, but it’s a reminder of God’s love and commitment to you. Disciples bear fruit because God will not stop until they do.<sup>16</sup>

So, I want to ask you three questions:

First, are you connected to the true vine? If anything, or anyone, is more important to you than Jesus, you’re not connected to the true vine. If that is the case, make Him your most important priority.

Second, are you abiding with Him? Are you reading His word? Are you praying? Are you in a group of other believers where you can hear the word of God through others? If not, get back to Him. Don’t let another day go by without His abiding presence.

Finally, are you becoming discouraged in your trial? Does it seem as if the burden you are bearing is too much? It is not under the expert hands of the pruning Father. He loves you and wants to make you the best you were designed to be. Trust Him and what He is doing.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:21 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, John 15:1.

<sup>16</sup> Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in John 15:1-6