

Sunday, May 2, 2021 Acts 8:26-40, I John 4:7-21, John 15:1-8

### I Am the True Vine

A couple of weeks ago, we had something very different occur for us in southwestern Ontario in the last days of April. Snow. Not just a few flurries or wind as one cloud passed by, but snow with big fluffy flakes, wet flakes and even heavier flakes. Most of us thought it would end before we went to bed that night, but it did not. In the morning when one looked out there was snow on the rooves, on bushes, spring buds trying to flower, and lawns. Everything was covered in snow! This is not normal weather for this time of year but then we might even wonder what is normal after receiving record high temperatures this past week!

But something else occurred that night for us. At some point in the night a huge branch broke off of a big tree in our front yard. We only noticed it when looking out the next morning, not having heard a thing at all. Sadly it was a fairly large branch which fell in the yard and did lie in the street as well. The branch was filled with leaves just starting to break open and grow as well as maple keys or seeds which were almost ready to fall. But with the branch breaking off these seeds and leaves were now on the ground and they would of course no longer grow. We ended up calling the city to come and cut up the branch and haul it away. The tree is all right though but where the branch broke off is a reminder of what can happen to vegetation large and small when challenges are seen and experienced. In this case, the wind was strong, the snow was heavy and its weight on the leaves and maple keys as well as the small branches, caused the bigger branch to break away from the trunk. Leading it to be broken and cut off from its source of water and nutrients.

As we continue to look at some of Jesus' "I am" statements our focus today is on the "I am the True Vine" and those of you who farm, grow vegetables and plants or even have some knowledge of watching plants grow know that in order for plants to live they need- water, sunshine, nutrients and of course a purpose or path in which to grow- either vertical or horizontal depending upon the kind of plant it is.

When Jesus stated, "I am the True Vine", those listening to him at that time knew what he meant because owning and looking after grapevines was part of the culture and industry that had been carefully cultivated throughout the country for centuries. It was crucial because it was a cash crop and vital to the economy of the land. Whether the people listening owned the vineyard or were hired hands, stating that he was the True Vine had special meaning and so he caught the attention of those who had gathered to hear him speak.

For vineyard workers then and today know that the care of the plants is unique. The vines are a very rugged crop in a way and in another sense it is a very delicate fruit and requires being treated lightly. A young vine is not permitted to bear fruit for the first three years. It is therefore drastically pruned in December and January to preserve its energy. The particular branches that do not bear fruit are cut out to further conserve the energy of the plant. If this

constant cutting back was not done, the result would be a crop that was not up to its full potential. So when Jesus says, "I am the True Vine" he knows that a vine does not exist on its own but needs to grow as its purpose is to spread out a little bit at a time through subsequent growing seasons. It produces branches, then further small branches until there is the place where the grapes will grow. The vine grower invests his time not just to grow vines and branches and leaves, but looks for the results—the grapes. This is the fruit which of course is consumed or processed into juice or wine. We know that wine was a significant part of the meal for people of Jesus' time as water quality nor quantity was easily or readily available. So in order to survive wine was shared regularly.

When Jesus said, "I am the True Vine" those listening and we who hear these words today need to realize that Jesus purpose for us is one of stability and strength. He is the vine and we are the branches. The vine is essential for the plant to grow but the branches are in need of pruning, cutting back and even cut away and destroyed if they fail to do what they are supposed to do—produce fruit! Therefore, from this statement we as branches connected to the Vine of Christ must produce fruit. And we must bear this fruit for the Kingdom of God. This is so that others will know that we are in relationship with Christ and bear His name.

As branches of the Vine of Christ we must produce. Our task as believers, as followers of Jesus, as disciples of Christ is to produce fruit and we must do it all of our life. Not just when we want to, or have the time to do it, or when we are bored, but all the time each and every day. And this is not just for those who are new believers, or people who are older. Producing the fruit of the Vine is for all people from the time we believe to the time prior to Christ's calling us home. We are called to a productive life in Christ.

And how do we do this? We must cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ. We must produce fruit for the Kingdom of God. We must build up our relationship with the True Vine by knowing him as Saviour, by trusting in his guidance and strength and by letting him pilot our lives not just for one day but every day God grants us to live and be. To build this relationship means reading God's word each day. And like the Ethiopian eunuch who read from the prophecy of Isaiah, he came to know Jesus as the suffering servant who died for him because of Philip's understanding and knowledge of Christ himself. Therefore, we are to read learn from others for our understanding and then produce for Christ.

We are the branches of Christ in the Kingdom of God and as we continue to grow in faith and understanding of Jesus, we are expected to produce the fruits of spiritual life. We are not speaking of spiritual apples, grapes, pears, or peaches, we are talking of what's going on in the orchard of your life. Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit, that is what we are to produce is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. So how is your harvest coming? What is in your orchard, or fruit basket, or just what are you producing as the fruit of Christ's True Vine?

We must remember that we cannot grow alone. We are an extension from the Vine of Christ, we are branches. We are rooted in and we draw strength and life from Jesus. We are intimately connected to him. If we are cut off from Jesus, we would be like the big branch that fell off my tree due to the heavy snow. It died, was chopped up and taken away. So what is it that we are doing to extend to others this life giving, and loving connection we have with Jesus?

How are we extending out in Christ's love- as a church family and as individuals? How are you cultivating your fruit in connection with Jesus as your True Vine? How are you called to serve Christ in these lock down days when it seems no one is connecting to others, that fear and hope are fading and that there is little to see beyond each day of cases, deaths and pandemic arguments.

What fruit are you striving to produce? There are billboards and in store announcements calling us to be kind and caring. This is a great reminder for us all. But what are you doing as you seek to produce fruit in your life? How are you extending to others Christ's love shown to us in his death and resurrection? Let us consider this as we respond in faith and with hope to be lead by faith and hold others in our hearts. Let us remember this as Jesus is the True Vine.

#### PRAYER

God of grace and love we praise you and thank you that you are the one true vine. Abide in us O God. Root us in love and kindness. Guide our actions and thoughts so that we can produce that will last. We ask this as we respond in faith and with hope that you will call us to serve you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.