

5 Easter B
Fruitier Followers

April 28, 2024
John 15:1-8

Last week I talked about folded followers – followers of Jesus that are in the sheep fold. This week our lesson talks about fruitful followers – and how we might become fruitier followers of Jesus.

Jesus presents a very simply analogy in our Gospel Lesson: Branches that are connected to the vine are supposed to bear fruit – and that happens naturally. If they don't, they are removed. They wither and are burned in a fire. If they are bearing fruit, they are pruned so that they might bear even more fruit.

Jesus' analogy raises some disturbing issues. Removing an unfruitful branch and pruning a fruitful branches are pretty much the same process. Both involve cutting off branches.

What does it mean for you good, fruit-bearing Christians to be pruned? What does it mean for you to bear more fruit?

Since I don't know much about gardening or pruning vines, I will say a few things about something I understand better – Greek words. There is a word connection that is hard to translate into English. The way it was translated in our reading was: "Every branch that bears fruit he **prunes**¹ to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been **cleansed**² by the word that I have spoken to you."

The Greek words translated "prunes" and "cleansed" are essentially the same word; one is a verb and the other is an adjective. They carry the sense of "removing the dirt or other bad stuff" which then means, "to clean" or "to purify."

The use of the Greek words indicates that: just as a gardener removes some branches so that other branches might bear more fruit, so Jesus' word removes something from our lives so that we will bear more fruit. God, through Jesus' word, prunes you or cleanses you or purifies you so that you might be fruitier followers.

The book of Hebrews gives this description of the word of God:

Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.³

The Word of God is sharp. The Word of God cuts deep into our lives. It exposes and seeks to remove the sin that it finds. That's how the Word of God prunes and purifies and cleanses us, so that we might bear more fruit.

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus said this about producing fruit:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains

¹ **John 15:2:** The same Greek root refers to pruning and cleansing

² **John 15:3:** The same Greek root refers to pruning and cleansing

³ Hebrews 4:12

just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.⁴

The way to produce more fruit is to die. That sounds worse than being pruned.

Dying means recognizing that you can't do it by yourself. No matter how good a branch is, it cannot produce fruit by itself. It needs the vine. No matter how good you are, you can't produce good fruit by yourself. You need Jesus. You need the Word of God in your life.

In more useful terms, dying to yourself means confessing your sins. As I said earlier, the Word of God exposes your sins. It seeks to cut out the sins in your life. Not only the things you do wrong, but sinful attitudes – such as arrogance, sinful thoughts – such as greedy desires, sinful feelings – such as hatred. The Word of God seeks to cleanse your life from all sins – everything in your life that keeps you from bearing more and more good fruit.

The emphasis in our text is not really on bearing fruit, but on our connection to the vine. This involves another Greek word that occurs seven times in our reading. It's translated, "abide," and it carries the sense of "remaining" or "staying" in the same place for an extended period of time. Jesus tells us earlier how we abide in him. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood **abide** in me, and I in them."⁵

We abide in Jesus and Jesus abides in us through Holy Communion. When connected this way to Jesus, the Word will expose our sins. We become aware of them. We confess them. We repent of them. We receive forgiveness for them. We are cleansed of them. It is then only natural that we will bear more fruit. Through the Word of God, we will naturally be pruned or cleansed over and over again so that we might produce even more fruit. We become fruitier followers.

What is the expected fruit? Just as the fruit of a tree provides good and healthy food for others – the tree doesn't need to eat the fruit, but humans, animals, worms, and bugs do; so the fruit that Jesus expects from us, is the good and helpful things we might do for others; such as producing 84 quilts to help warm and protect cold bodies. The ladies don't do all this work for themselves, but for those who will receive these beautiful quilts.

In addition, just as the fruit contains seeds that can produce another tree, so the fruit that Jesus expects from us could also be a friend coming to believe in Jesus like we do. We can't control who might come to faith or not. We have some control over being good, nourishing, kind friends to all the people we meet. Who knows how God might grow the seeds we plant in other people?

On one hand, our faith remains the same throughout our lives. We continue to remain on the vine. We continue to be connected to Jesus through the Word and Sacrament we receive in worship. Our faith is firmly rooted in Jesus Christ and that never changes.

On the other hand, our faith and our lives are always changing. We won't be quite the same people next year as we are now. We will be pruned and cleansed by the Word of God. Maybe some old habits need to be exposed and removed. Maybe some old thoughts and ideas need to be exposed and removed. Maybe some old attitudes need to be exposed and removed. It's likely that there will be sins exposed and forgiven. This pruning in our lives is

⁴ John 12:24

⁵ John 6:56

meant to produce even more fruit for the good of others in the name of Jesus.

Good gardeners prune the branches on the vine so that the vine will produce more fruit. That's also what our heavenly Father does with us to make us fruitier followers of Jesus.