

“Fruitful Living”

John 15:1-12

On one level, I’m quite sure I’m not qualified to address these verses today on vines, branches, and fruit. I’m one of those people who thinks of plant life as trees, bushes, flowers, grass, and of course, weeds. A good example of my limitations is an incident that occurred a number of years ago when we moved into our house in Bethesda, Maryland. On one side of the house there was this huge bush growing so tall that it was stuck underneath the eave of the second story. I was committed to protecting our home, so I was determined to take care of that bush. I took out my trusty chainsaw and proceeded to cut that bush off at ground level. I’ll never forget the expression on Cindy’s face when she saw what I had done and told me that I had just cut down one of the most beautiful lilac bushes she had ever seen. Fortunately, that lilac bush grew back, at an angle, away from the house! To this day, I have to get permission to use the chainsaw (not really). Drawing from something He saw as He was walking with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says to His disciples, and to us, that our lives are like a branch that is attached to a vine. Your life is a significant life, a productive life if it is a fruitful life. My four points today address the possibility for you and me to enjoy a fruitful life.

First, Jesus says your fruitful life is not produced by acquiring things: material wealth, power, position, or popularity. The fruitful and productive life is a life of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Fruitful life is produced in your relationships. Those fruits are the result of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They’re the result of Jesus Christ Himself coming into your life and living in you. You see, the indispensable heart of your life as a Christian is not that your character has been reformed or renewed. No, it’s an entirely new character, the character of your Savior and Lord alive and working in your life! Please understand that a fruitful life can belong to anyone regardless of his or her age, education, background, or circumstances. You can be six or sixty, male or female, rich or poor. There’s no distinction. The opportunity is for all who have received Jesus Christ into their lives as their personal Savior and Lord! It has been rightly pointed out that each of the qualities of Galatians 5 is a display of the first fruit, love: Joy is love enjoying itself; peace is love resting; patience is love waiting; kindness is love reacting; goodness is love choosing; faithfulness is love keeping its word; gentleness is love empathizing; and self-control is love resisting temptation. The point being that living a fruitful life is primarily loving others as Christ loves you, and that’s a love that displays itself actively in your relationships.

Second, your fruitful life is produced by “remaining” in Jesus and His love. Talk about repetition to make a point! Remaining is repeated 12 times in these verses. Remaining in Jesus means staying in a vital, ongoing, living connection with Him and His love for you. Not once a week, not even every other day of the week. It’s every day, continually. In verse five Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” Disconnecting, cutting yourself off from Jesus is like cutting a branch off of a vine. As soon as that occurs, the branch stops producing fruit and begins to die. That’s why Jesus can add, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” No fruit, no life at all. It’s living in continual, conscious dependence on Jesus Christ that you produce the fruits of His love in your life. Your fruitful, successful life is also produced by obeying Jesus. Verse 10 says, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.” I know the immediate reaction here is “Ugh, obedience.” I’m afraid we have this mindset that obedience means I’m submitting to someone who doesn’t have my best interests at heart. Obedience means I’m going to be miserable. But remember that one of the key characteristics of Jesus’ love for you is that He puts your best interests first. In love, He’s seeking, He’s pursuing, and He’s providing God’s very best for you. Jesus came to save you from sinful, barren, and destructive living. Everything He commands you to obey is based on His perfect wisdom, knowledge, and love. In Jesus’ eyes, obeying Him is a “no brainer,” because it’s for your benefit, your blessing.

Third, your fruitful life is a growing life. Notice the progression in Jesus’ teaching. In the first part of verse 2 He speaks to the necessity of fruit in your life. But then He goes on to say that the presence of fruit is not enough because pruning takes place to ensure that you become more fruitful. But then we come to verse 8, which speaks not of fruit, or more fruit, but of “much fruit,” that is, an abundance of fruit. Jesus here warns you, I think,

about the danger of complacency. You're never to be satisfied with just a little fruit in your life. The future always holds opportunities for further growth and maturity, of an even greater abundance of fruitfulness.

Fourth, your fruitful life produces a number of benefits. The first is that it brings glory to God. In verse 8 Jesus says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit." Again, the presence of fruit or even more fruit doesn't glorify God. It's the production of much, an abundance in your life that glorifies Him. Understand that God, by His very nature is always committed to glorifying Himself. He wants to display His glory, magnify it. Here's an incredible thought: He wants to display it and magnify it in your life. Do you realize that? Do you believe that? God wants to glorify Himself in your life! The opportunity you have to glorify God reminds me of that great statement in the Westminster Catechism: "The chief end" (purpose) "of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That brings us to the second result of a fruitful life: joy. In verse 11 Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Joy is the result of doing what Jesus says. As you remain in vital, continual connection with Him, as you obey Him, "His joy" will be "your joy," and you're to receive it and enjoy it in abundance. That's the meaning of the clause, "that your joy might be complete." The fullness, the richness of the joy of the eternal God is what Jesus wants you to enjoy. If there is a great need today, it is that believers in Jesus Christ be more joyful. Unfortunately, there's too much of just the opposite. There's a well-known cartoon of a man with a sour, pained expression on his face. In the caption he replies, "No, I'm not a Christian, I just have a bad head cold." That cartoon speaks volumes about the perception that too many Christians are going through life with unhappy, distressed attitudes that show up in dour, sad expressions on their faces. John Wesley said it well, "Sour godliness is the devil's religion." We don't need "sourpuss Christians." Jesus calls you and me, He calls us, His church to be an oasis of joy and hope in a world that is a desert, a desert of depression and fear and anxiety. Next, we see that a fruitful life produces a powerful prayer life. Verse 7 is pretty self-explanatory. Jesus says, "If you remain in Me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you." You want to see answers to your prayers? You want to see change take place, change for the better? Jesus says remain vitally connected to me and watch what happens! One reason why prayer plays an important part in our worship is that as we've received the love of Jesus and as we live it, we expect God to empower our prayers in a mighty, life-changing way as He answers them, as He glorifies Himself through our prayers. Fourth, a fruitful life is conclusive proof that you're a Christian. In verse 8 Jesus says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." We recall John 13:35 from last week: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." It's as if Jesus turns to the watching world and says, "I've got something to say to you. On the basis of My authority, I give you this right. You may judge whether or not a man, woman, boy, or girl is a Christian or not. Here's the basis of your judgment: do they love one another?" There's a sense in which it doesn't matter what we say about ourselves, it's what the watching world says about us that counts. You prove to unbelievers that you're a Christian if you love other Christians just as Christ loves you.

Are you living a fruitful, productive life? A life of quality relationships characterized by growing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so on? Or are you working against yourself, engaged in pursuits that undermine and can even destroy those relationships? Does the joy that comes from glorifying God describe your heart, your demeanor as you go through your day, or does discontent, unhappiness, or some other emotion rule? It could be that you need to consider the connection between your life and Jesus Christ. Maybe you've never been connected to Him in this personal, vital, life-changing way. If that's the case, today is your day. Today is your opportunity to receive into your life Jesus Christ and the salvation, the life, the love, the joy that is found only in Him. If you would like to take advantage of that opportunity, please speak to Andy, Tom, or me after the service. Maybe you are a Christian, but you've neglected that connection to your Savior and Lord. Fruit is not in abundance in your life. Sure, you're busy, and you're busy doing all kinds of good things, but you're also frustrated, worn out, and discouraged. If that's the case, realize that this is not Jesus' desire, His plan for you. Come back to Him, get connected, and remain in that connection, the life, the love that are yours in Jesus Christ. It is there and only there that you will find and enjoy significant life, productive life, and fruitful life!