

Fifth Sunday of Easter: May 15, 2009
Sermon text: John 15:1-3
Sermon Hymn: LSB 595- "O Blessed Spring"
Sermon title: God Spells "life": J-E-S-U-S

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, the Vinedresser, and from Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, our Life-giving vine. Amen.

"Get a life!" We hear this so much anymore. A popular phrase when I was in high school and college. If you think about it, it's usually directed at someone by someone who feels what he does and how he lives to be the way to live. Maybe the foundation of the person's thinking is that what he possesses (cars, home), the kind of job he has, and etc. is so much better in one way or another than other person's.

I'm pretty sure if I were asked all of you to raise your hand if someone has said "get a life" to you, many of you would raise your hand. Same as if I were to ask you to raise your hand if you've ever said it to someone else, or even thought it about someone else.

It does hurt to be told to get a life. A statement like that implies that someone believes you have no life, no value, and no worth. And, that simply hurts.

Who determines what life is anyway? A good life? Who sets the criteria to determine life? Where did the idea of "life" come from and who started it? Just a brief, quick look around in the world you'll find all kinds of answers to these questions. Some consider possession to make life, material things, power over others, to name a couple. Then if these are the two main criteria, then who determines what material possessions in particular, and what kind of power over what kind of people? ~~Gets really messy answering these questions about life without recognizing the One true author, source, and giver of life. In fact, answering these questions about

life without that recognition, a person is constantly searching with no hope of finding an answer.

Here is the answer to all questions about and concerning life. God spells “life:” J-E-S-U-S.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

In these verses, in this passage, which is our Gospel this morning, Jesus is using an ‘I AM’ statement. Jesus, as God, gets to use the words ‘I AM’ to tell us who He is, who He is to us. Jesus says, “I am,” meaning, Jesus is the One and the Only way. And, in particular, He is the Only source of life. Without Him no life exists.

This illustration of the vinedresser, the vine, and the branch was nothing uncommon to those Jesus spoke to. Very simple to understand and that was Jesus’ intention. He wanted these people He was speaking to understand that without Him they had no life, and with Him they truly and absolutely had life.

Yet, there is another element in this illustration, and that is the fruit Jesus is talking about. For those He was speaking to fruit was important. Fruit was the reason why anyone who labored in a vineyard. If vines and branches produced no fruit their labor was in pointless. They depended on a good turn out of fruit. The selling and trading of that fruit provided their income. So, to see fruit growing out of the branch, that was very pleasing to the eyes and heart.

Jesus is using this illustration of fruit to illustrate what comes out of our hearts. And, what is in our hearts, what comes out of our hearts and is made manifest and evident in what we say to others, what we do with our

hands, what we look at with our eyes, the places our feet take us to, what our ears listen to, what our minds think of, and so, and so on.

This fruit Jesus is talking about are all the things that are pleasing to God. It is what God likes to see coming out of our hearts, and done with our hands, and feet, with our eyes and ears, and from our mouths. This fruit Jesus is talking about are the very things God created us to produce.

So, how do we produce such good fruit? Well, we have a life, the right kind of life that produces the right kind of fruit. Quite simple, isn't it? And, that's why Jesus uses such a simple illustration.

Do we have that right life? Where's it come from? And, how do we acquire it? Do we read our Bibles and try really hard to do what it says? Do we analyze the things we do from day to day, sort out the bad things from the good things, and try harder the next day to do only the good ones again?

Well, friends, the source of energy, the wisdom, and the willingness, to produce the kind of fruit, to do the things in life, that are so pleasing to God is not anything we will find in ourselves, or anywhere in the world, but only in J-E-S-U-S, and J-E-S-U-S is how God spells life. Jesus is the life, the only life. If we have the life and produce the fruit God wants us to, then it is not our life, but it is the life of Jesus.

And, the illustration Jesus uses of vinedresser, the vine, and the branch directs us to recognize that life. Right here Jesus gives us just the right ingredients to produce what is so pleasing in His eyes,...fruit.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." We recall what we know so well, and what we are so sure of...that God loved us so much that He sent His Son. God desired to get back what was lost and what belonged to Him in the first place. God made us. He not only made our bodies, but gave us life, gave us breathe, and a soul. He made us to

serve Him with everything, and to serve Him only, to serve Him within an unbroken and perfect relationship with Him. Always wanting, always willing to do what He wants us to do.

Yet, we all know what happened. The first sin was committed and just as God said would happen, we died. That perfect relationship severed. Since then, all men, and women, have been born into this world without a life.

All along God had a plan to reestablish the relationship He created us to have with Him and Him with us. He promised to send a Savior, redeem that relationship. Just as Jesus illustrates in our Gospel, God the Father sent His Son. God the Father is the One who establishes the way and the source of life. He is the vinedresser, just as Jesus spoke. And, not only does He initiate and begin the process by which fruit is the result, but He continues to give energy and nutrition for fruit to continue to be produced.

The connection God the Father uses between us and Him is Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus said, He is the true vine. Not just any vine. There are a lot of false vines out there that look good and sound good, but only is He the true vine. Jesus even claimed of Himself, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This authority Jesus has is none other than the authority to give life, life that produces fruit.

And, this illustration Jesus uses also includes the branch, the fruit-bearing branch at that. Such a beautiful and magnificent illustration this is. It reveals not only the result of what God gives, but it reveals also what God desires, completion. What God gives does not come back to Him empty. He gives life that life produces fruit, and it all returns to Him. We are, as those Jesus, the life-giving vine, has given life to, fruit-bearing branches.

Friends, there is no room, no reason, for any of us to look to ourselves for fruitful, meaningful lives. We joyfully consider how we became fruit-bearing branches. Are we are fruit-bearing branches. Just as surely as the water made contact with your skin in your baptism are you fruit-bearing branches. Just as surely as the Holy Spirit has worked through the Words of promise that your sins are forgiven, are you fruit-bearing branches.

I believe this reality, this truth, this wonderful truth, slips our minds and hearts so often. “Get a life?” we have a life, the only life. In fact by the time you realized you have that life, you had already been given that life.

Sin once stood in between us and God. Now, Jesus, who suffered God’s wrath on sin, stands between us and God. There is no question Christ is connected to us, and us to Christ. That is His promise in His Word. And, to doubt such a thing, well,...really, it isn’t doubt, but it is unbelief. But, we can be so sure, what Christ wants to be to us, He really is just that. It’s His promise and it’s His doing.

It all depends on an interrelationship with Jesus Christ. And, that relationship is started and completed, yes, started and completed, with His Words, “you are forgiven.”

That is what our relationship with God the Father, the vinedresser, and Jesus Christ, the life-giving vine, depends on,...His Word of promise that we are forgiven. Our sins were the only thing standing between us God. And, only God could break down and demolish that barrier. It was His plan all along to send His Son, as the sacrifice to satisfy God’s justice.

Oh, yes, we are sure that we are now the fruit-bearing branch that Jesus is talking about. Jesus says so, He promises so.

Yet, as sure as we are, we still sometimes wonder, do we remain so? Friends, just as Jesus’ illustration of the vinedresser, the life-giving vine, and

the fruit-bearing branch illustrates to us, the life we have been given keeps on coming from the same source it came from in the first place. God wants it that way and He keeps it that way.

Jesus says, as we see in verse 3, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” What needs to be done for our relationship with Jesus Christ to be made is done. What needs to be done for our relationship with Jesus, Jesus continues, we can be sure of that. He gives us His Word for us to continually here of this very truth. He gives us His body and blood through which we receive that very same promise in His Word.

In all truthfulness friends, the fruit we produce is all God’s doing. God is the source of all that is needed for it to happen. In such a way, the fruit we see coming from one another is what Jesus produced.

What God did through Jesus Christ is the reason we have a new relationship with God. It is the reason we are able to do good things. It is the reason we are able to look right past all the hardships in this life and to life eternal with Him in paradise. It is all a consequence of what He produced in our behalf.

Apart from Christ we have nothing, we are nothing. With Christ in us and us in Christ, we have life. And, having life, we have it all, all that we may ever want or need.

“Get a life!” Friends, we have a life. It is the only life that exists. In this life we lack nothing, but have it all. And, this life began with Jesus’ Words, “you are forgiven.” Amen.