

**In Nomine Iesu**  
**Pentecost Sunday 2023**  
**Divine vinedresser, life-giving vine – John 15:1-11**

**Exordium**

My family once lived in Grants Pass. Dozens of vineyards could be found within an hour's drive. We saw their beautiful contours flowing across hills and valleys, whose climate is so similar to that which our Lord and His disciples knew and experienced through their three and a half years of walking together throughout Israel.

Have you ever taken a close look at what lies behind the beauty of vineyards and the wines they produce? Now, in the spring, the vineyards are green and growing, giving promise of what will come at harvest time. But harvest does not just happen by itself. In fact, it is actually what happens after the harvesting that determines the success of the following year. The pruning process takes place in the late fall. The branches are trimmed back so severely that all that remains through the winter is the vine itself that comes up from the ground vertically and usually two bare horizontal branches, one on each side of the almost completely pruned off center stalk or vine. Ironically, a well-tended vineyard looks mutilated and barren in the winter, lifeless.

In the spring everything changes. Now this may not seem profound, but think about it for a moment. There is nothing there in winter, no buds, only dead-looking branches, and a seemingly dry, twisted vine coming up out of the ground. The vine creates the buds on the branches. And from them come beautiful green leaves, and then from the branches the fruit begins to appear. It is the vine that gives life to its severely pruned branches, from which abundant fruit appears. This is a simple fact of everyday life, well known to the twelve who sat at table with Jesus that night. They had seen the process many times. The vine gives life to the branches in order that they in turn may bring forth fruit. Jesus is that vine. He calls His Father the Vinedresser. The power that flows through the vine to us is the Holy Spirit.

**Let us rise and confess this truth by singing Hymn 399.**

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, from whom we draw life. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

**I**

We first began to know that there was a vine and we are its branches in our baptism,

whether as an adult or in the first days of life. Indeed, God's gracious power is most evident when an infant is baptized. The infant has nothing to do with coming to his or her baptism, just as a branch has nothing to do with being joined to the vine! It is God who calls us through the power of His Word. It is God's power working through and with others that brought us to baptism. It is all God's doing, as Jesus had said of Him: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (John 6:44) And baptism, the water connected with the power of that Word, is what changed your life.

Our life in the vine began because of the power of God. By the grace of God we were called to faith, and given the very ability to believe in Christ. Were it not so, it would not be grace. Becoming a branch of God's vine, the vine that is Jesus Christ, involved no cooperation on our part. Indeed, St. Paul tells us we were dead, blind, enemies of God before He called us into His light. He called and so, we were enabled to believe.

What matters afterwards is that the branch remains in the vine. If one is disconnected from the vine, cut off from the means of grace, the Word, the Lord's Table, then one severs oneself from the nourishment that God gives, and you begin to starve. You can go for a while without being nourished, but not for long.

Young people who confess their faith at confirmation may think they have no further need for God's nourishment, and wander away, thus severing themselves from Christ, their source of nourishment. But such severing is not the work of God. That is not the pruning the Father, the Vinedresser, does. The Father prunes away from our lives that which He sees will harm us. It is we who prune away the very things that give life.

Parents, even grandparents, must be reminded here. Some parents think they are done guiding their children's lives when the day of confirmation arrives. Now, they think, the kids decide what to do. But wait. Remember, there is a part of all of us that resists God. That part clings to us even as it does to our children. It finds reasons, excuses, why this or that Sunday will not work for us, even adding piously, "I know God will understand." We all have such thoughts. It is a part of the sinful nature that clings to us, whether we are old or young. We all need to be reminded and encouraged to hear God's word, to remain connected to the vine that is Christ Jesus our Lord.

We might even fall into thinking: "I learned about right and wrong a long time ago. I went to church as a child and a young person. Since then I've lived a good life. I've been a good neighbor, good husband or wife. I've even been a pretty good father or mother. I know God's word is important, but I already know what it says." Let's say for a moment, that's all true. It can look that way from our perspective. But consider what Jesus said, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

## II

When was the last time you saw vineyard workers cutting branches from the vine in the summer? Or when did you see the grapes, just formed, tiny and green, cut from the vine, and left to develop on their own? There is a good reason why Jesus used the example of vinedresser, vine, branch, and fruit to illustrate His relationship to us. It is easy to understand. It is demonstrably true in the natural world. It reminds us all that things work when the right order is followed, the order God has established. If you disagree, go ahead, buy a vineyard and try doing things differently than all vineyard owners have done for centuries. See how long you survive in the business.

It may seem to us that it's we who produce the fruit. It is my goodness, my discipline, my knowledge of right and wrong that produces good fruit in my life and so benefits those who are near and dear to me. It is my goodness that produces good around me. But listen to all that Jesus said to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, the night Judas went out to produce better fruit on his own: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

On this Pentecost Sunday, let us understand well what Jesus is saying about Himself being the vine and we the branches. Why is it that branches connected to the vine stay alive and healthy, bearing good fruit? Because there is something that flows from the vine to the branch, and through the branch – through us! - to produce fruit. There is a life force that works in a certain way. This life force works one way in botany and in another way in the spiritual realm. And God is the Author and Ruler of all of it.

The life force that flows from the vine, our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ tells us, is the Holy Spirit, whose working in the hearts and lives of God's people we take note of today. The Apostle Paul explains Jesus' words this way: "The **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-23)

It is the Spirit who was given to us when we were baptized, when we were grafted into the vine that is Jesus Christ. It is He who flows into our hearts and minds when we hear the Gospel and receive the Lord's body and blood in the Supper He instituted on the night in which He was betrayed. These things Jesus commanded and instituted for us to use for our good, just as He said: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

We may think it doesn't work this way. We may be listen to explanations of others. But just remember, what God calls good is good. But what someone else calls good, may or may not - in reality - be good. And it certainly cannot be good if it disagrees with the plain, clear will of God. Remember, the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden looked better and better to the woman as she listened to the serpent's smooth and confident explanations. But it was not so, as she learned to her bitter regret.

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Vinedresser, vine, branch, and fruit: the Father, the Son, the Christian, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, that is God's order of things. It is the plain, clear sense of Jesus' words here in John 15. Everything good in us, from beginning to end, is the doing of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the establishment of faith in our hearts, to the living out of it in our lives, to the producing of the fruit that makes good and sweet the lives of those around us. It is all by grace. It is all God's doing. Shall we argue with God? Shall we listen to the arguments of those who are against what God says? Or shall we simply say: Thank God, who forgives me for Jesus' sake, and works such good in me! Jesus is the vine, never will I leave Him. How grateful I am that He has grafted me to Himself. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**