

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

What do you think? Is your life like a video that God is making? You are the star, all the rest the supporting cast. What you want, what you need, what you hope, these will be the focus of the scenes. And when the video is done, your life will be judged by the answers to these questions: Were you happy? Was life pleasant? Were you loved?

Who will God be in your video? God will be your servant. Did he help you and carry you and provide for you and bless you? If so then God will have been worthy of you, good enough to be your God. But if you are unhappy, or your life turns unpleasant, or you don't feel loved, then God will have been a failure.

Or is your life as Jesus tells us: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower."

Drive down Walker road here in Avon Lake, see row after row of posts and wires. From the earth come the vines, old, enduring. Year after year new shoots spring from the vine, branches, leaves, blossoms, fruit. Owners tend the land, tend and prune the vines that the fruit will be plump and sweet, a rich harvest. Then comes fall, leaves wither and drop onto the earth and only the vine remains.

Jesus says: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches."

Can you imagine a video of a vineyard? Leaves growing, branches extending, owner cutting, pruning, fruit forming, ripening. Jesus is saying that this is what your life is about, you branches on a vine.

Sounds kind of boring, doesn't it?

Your video was going to be about your racing and chasing and finding and getting. Your video was going to be about your favorite subject, you. You the winner, you the center of attention, you the happy one, you.

And Jesus' video is about a vine that goes nowhere, and branches that have life of producing fruit for the owner, fruit for someone else to eat.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire, and burned."

We've seen some withering branches, burned up branches. Elvis, John Belushi, maybe some people you know too who live for self and self alone. They chase after their happiness but never find it. All the while they wither because they do not abide, live in the vine. Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. Apart from me you can do nothing."

We were not created to stand alone. God did not breathe life into us so that we could seek our own glory and our own happiness, put our own self in the center. You and I were created by God to be branches in God's vineyard.

"I am the vine," says Jesus, "you are the branches."

For two years you six young people and your families have adjusted your life around confirmation instruction. Often it must have seemed a bother, rushing to church, taking time to read, to study to pray. Often it must have seemed as exciting as a video of a vine growing.

Abiding in Jesus is no quick road to happiness. Listening to Jesus' word when the church is crowded and air is stuffy, praying when your eyelids are heavy and sleep is inviting, trusting in Jesus when danger or temptation is near, none of these are easy. But when the road of your life has ended you who abide in Jesus will have been most truly blessed.

These past two years have been the easy part of your abiding in the vine. Your parents, your teachers and I have told you what was required, what you needed to do. But from now on you will have only Jesus' word.

His word is that as you live in him, abide in him, your life will be what God intends. Like a branch in a vine from Jesus you will receive the love that will be your food, and Jesus word that will keep you from falling away, and forgiveness that will repair tears that might cause you to whither. Day after day, year after year as you live in Jesus, faith will bind you more and more to him, and you will be blessed.

“I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me as I abide in you.” This is Jesus’ word and will for your life.

And if you abide in him, and he in you, when all the other branches are withered and gone, dried out, dead, you will be fresh and new in the kingdom of God. Green and alive, like leaves in the early spring, you have life in him forever.