

*"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.*

Have you ever given a gift because you wanted to - not because it was expected: a birthday, or an anniversary, or graduation? A real gift that you gave because you wanted to give joy to another? Maybe when you were a child you picked a dandelion all bright and yellow, and gave it to your mother because you wanted her to have the joy that this little circle of sunshine brought you. Or a rock different from all the rest, fascinating to your young eye, before they taught you that only things that cost money were valuable. Maybe that first lightning bug you captured, like nothing you'd ever seen before, you rushed to share it with a sister, a brother.

If you can remember what it was once like to give a gift, or if you still can give, just for the joy of giving to those you love, then you are ready to hear what God is doing.

God is raising some sweet, sweet fruit to give to those he loves. Like an orange that really tastes like an orange, or a melon, just right, or a peach, juicy and sweet, delicious. God is raising some fruit just for the joy of giving to those he loves. Jesus told about it in this way:

"I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower." God is raising grapes. Jesus is the vine that God has planted; you are branches growing from that vine. Jesus said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." From you God is planning on producing the sweetest grapes, and the poor and the hungry and the thirsty will taste the fruit is growing through you and they will say, "Thank you, God."

This is the picture, the image Jesus gives you for understanding your own life. You are the branch from which God will produce the sweetest fruit. How will it happen? Listen.

"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. You have already been pruned by the word I have spoken to you."

God is busy working on you, pruning, trimming, nourishing. Jesus says this is how you should understand your life, through Jesus' word Jesus is preparing you to bear fruit.

Jon and Stacey, have you noticed how much the Bible has been the center of our confirmation instruction? Daily devotions, Sunday and Wednesday classes, time with your mentors, again and again we have led you to the scriptures. Through Jesus word God is trimming you, readying you to bear fruit, season after season, to bear fruit. Scripture is not some facts you learn, stories you memorize, but the place that God intends to encounter you and prepare you all the days of your life. Whatever will not help you to bear fruit God will snip away, prune, so that God can make the sweetest fruit grow from you.

Jesus said, "Abide in me just 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."

All of your life you will be tempted to think that you can handle things by yourself - like a branch trying to bear fruit apart from the vine. But Jesus says that won't work. Abide in me, Jesus says. Listen to him, follow him, trust in him, pray to him. The sweet fruit of love will naturally follow, for it will come from Jesus. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit," he promises. "If you abide in me, and my words in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Ask, pray to God and you will be sweet fruit. You will be God's joyous gift to your neighbor.

So when you think about your life, think about what God is doing. As the second lesson says, "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." Jesus is the sweet fruit that God has prepared for you, a fruit that gives you life now, and for all eternity. And through him God is making you into sweet fruit that through Jesus' work in you, God's love might be shared with your neighbor.