

"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.

I got a deal this week – standing in line at Marc's the woman in front of me showed me the rake she was buying – told me where in the store she found it. I went looking for a rake and came home with this: (hold up the clippers.) \$7.99. Cutting off dead branches will be fun with these.

But I am not up here doing ads for Marc's today but to consider Jesus' word in our gospel. Listen: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit."

Think of God going to work on you with these. God is going to do some cutting – removing the branches that bear no fruit. Jesus said, "He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit." In me. Jesus is not talking about the unbelievers – those who have turned their backs on Jesus. Jesus is talking about the branches that are attached to him but who bear no fruit.

Earlier that evening Jesus had washed his disciples' feet. Jesus took the place of the servant. Love one another as I have loved you, he taught his disciples.

Love. Jesus, the true vine, is not into clusters of grapes but into clusters of love - not the syrupy sweet romantic kind of love but the hardy sort of love that can withstand the scorching sun and not grow sour - the cleaning up the bathroom after a sick child kind of love - the digging deep into your pocket to help an out of work neighbor with the monthly mortgage kind of love - the always taking time to stop and talk to the teenager who lives next door kind of love - whole clusters of this sort of love.

But when there is no fruit in you or in me Jesus says the Father removes the branch. Cuts it off.

And when there is fruit the vine grower prunes. “Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. Think of God using these (hold up pruning shears) on you- snipping away at some arrogance - cutting away indifference - trimming back the greed and selfishness - always working to make the branch vibrant and healthy so large clusters of love will form and grow and ripen and delight the Father in heaven.

But of course God does not use shears. Listen: “You have already been cleansed by the word which I have spoken to you.” Every word Jesus speaks is a cleansing of you, a pruning, a preparing you for abundant growth, abundant fruit of love.

“Abide in me and I abide in you,” says Jesus. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”

Great clusters of love do not come from us. It is not the kind of person that I am or that you are. The fruit God desires is created and grows because we abide in Jesus. God does not ask you to make something special of yourself – the Father in heaven has brought forth your life out of the very being of God’s Son. As St. Paul said, “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” Try to make of yourself a wonderful loving person and you will fail. Especially in the moment when love is really tested you will fail. But trust in Jesus and draw your strength from him and his love will burst forth. “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

“I am the vine, you are the branches,” says Jesus. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because 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, thrown into the fire and burned.”

I don’t like it when Jesus speaks in this way. His words are harsh. But I think I know how he feels.

I have spruce trees all along the back of my yard. This spring I am discovering a disease in them - branches dying. And when the dead branches are not cut out the disease spreads. A year ago these branches were

contributing to the health of the whole tree. I treasured them. Today they are spreading death. I will take my new tool and chop them off and destroy them.

Jesus speaks of cutting off branches because the health of the whole vine is affected by the sickness of sin in any one. Jesus forgives sin so that he can save the branches, pruning away all that does not lead to health and vitality and large clusters of fruit. But some branches persist in sin, persist in fruitlessness. The Father will cut them away.

I think of the branch that is Christ Lutheran. Jesus feeds us from his own being. Deriving life from the vine, pruned by the word, God is ready to produce abundant fruit - to bless people in our homes and communities and beyond our communities, even in all the world. When we abide in Christ and are nourished by his word love is the result – God is glorified. Jesus is not interested in us just looking pretty or in our feeding from him so we can be happy. Jesus wants fruit.

Abide in him, hear his word. The Father will have abundant fruit.