

I LOVE SUNDAYS
“Good Sundays Make Better Mondays”
Isaiah 58:13-14; John 15:1-9

Introduction

This is our second week for the worship theme “I Love Sundays.” This week I made a list of things I love. I love skiing and golf. I love the sunshine, vacation, and swimming at the beach. A Sunday afternoon nap watching football through my eyelids. And, of course, I love Petey my grandson.

Before reading from John 15 and hearing the message, just for fun, turn to someone near you and in thirty seconds or less, tell each other three things you love. Ready? Set? Go...

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Was “I Love Sundays” on your list? I hope that these five Sundays here at 1st Pres will make it on your short or long list. Because Sundays Make Better Mondays.

So, yes, let’s read John 15:1-9.

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.”

I. Abide in Christ (vs. 5)

Jesus begins by saying, “I, I am the true vine, really.” The “I am” declarations of Jesus are outstanding because he claims to be the great “I am” of God’s people. All human beings look for the heart of the matter at some point in life. Believers in Jesus sense that they are in touch with the core of reality.

His Father, God, is the gardener, the vineyard keeper, but the Son, Jesus, is front and center in this marvelous passage.

Four times Jesus says, “Remain in me.” In the King James Version, the word translated “remain” is “abide.” It means to live in, to walk with, to be connected, to stick with, to keep on keeping on. Jesus said, “Abide in me, as I also abide in you... If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit... If you abide in me and my words abide in you... Now abide in my love.” Jesus invites us to live with him. The question is obvious. How do we do that? How do you abide in Christ?

The primary way is by Word and Prayer. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Word and Prayer. Making your home in the Word of God in Christ is critical to being a fruitful branch in the vine. The Bible is an imposing book. And it has much for us to learn and know from any portion of it. But be sure to spend a lot of time with Jesus in the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have the abiding words of Jesus. In John 8, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

I am not a fan of red-letter editions mostly because I find the red print difficult to read. But they highlight the words of Jesus in red; easy to find, easy to collect in your mind and heart: his word, his message, his gospel. You and I can abide in Christ as his word is preached and taught in the fellowship of the church, in family devotions, small group discussions, and in private reading.

Ever since the Lord took hold of my life at age 19, I have loved Sundays because I heard the word of God read and preached at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Westerly Road and Windsor Chapel in NJ, North Shore Baptist Church in MA, the Presbyterian Church of Old Greenwich, CT. And for 31 years I have been blessed to read and preach the word in NY, NJ and UT. I Love Sundays for sharing God’s word together. I hope you do as well.

We also make our home with Jesus by prayer. We respond to his preaching by speaking with him honestly. That’s what prayer is. As we abide in Christ and his word, Jesus says, “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” There are many forms and ways of praying. But the best way is by reading Jesus’ words and then talking with him about it. It’s pretty simple.

Here’s an example: Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” I would respond to this word something like this: “Lord Jesus, I know that I can (that we can) find life and nurture and growth only in you. I want my life (we want our lives) to be fruitful. I know (we know) what it feels like when the Father cuts away the things that stunt the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. Sometimes it is painful. Yet I know (we know), our gracious and loving Father in heaven,

you know what is best for every branch in the vine. I ask, Lord, to make me fruitful in life, faith, and ministry.” Did you follow how praying Jesus’ words makes it personal. Later today read through John 15 and talk it over with your Savior Jesus. I Love Sundays because every week I am reminded to pray.

Resting in God’s word and responding in prayer: that is what the Sabbath was all about. We read in Isaiah 58, “If you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it... then you will find your joy in the Lord.”

II. Bear Fruit (vs. 2, 4, 5, 8)

Seven times in eight verses, Jesus mentions bearing fruit. Do you think Jesus is emphasizing an essential part of his message here? Commenting on this passage, St. Augustine said, “A branch is suitable only for one of two things, either for the vine or for the fire” (aut vitis aut ignis – vine or fire). Jesus wants for you and me, for the church itself to be suitable for the vine.

What does it mean to bear fruit? How do we do that or how does that happen? Let’s take the Sermon on the Mount, that amazing collection of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Do we regularly acknowledge our need for Jesus? Personally and as a church? That’s fruit bearing. For Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

How about “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” What kind of fruit is it to take revenge on someone who has hurt you?

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Success in this world is measured by the accumulation of wealth. Who isn’t impressed by three winners of the \$1.6 billion power ball lottery? How will these people remain, abide in Christ? Will those branches wither, dry up, be cut off and thrown into the fire? Or will they bear fruit? I don’t know. But God does.

The apostle Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness” and remote control (as one little girl quoted to her dad in front of the TV (in Galatians 5 it’s self-control). But notice it’s the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of Mike or the fruit of Chris. The vine supplies all that is needed for the branch to be fruitful. We need Jesus. He said, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.”

Fruit comes in many varieties, sizes, shapes, flavors and colors. I’m sure that bearing fruit differs from person to person and church to church. “Fruit” in Jesus’ sense, as we trust in him, is a heart for others. He said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). Paul wrote to the church in Romans 15, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” And in Ephesians 4, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” In Romans 14, “Let us stop

passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.”

Remember Hebrews 10 from last week? “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

In I Peter, he also wrote to the church: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” And, “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as sisters and brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

And that’s all within the church. There are many ways of bearing fruit outside the church, in the world around us.

Conclusion

I love Sundays because they remind me to abide in Christ, make a home in his words, and grow in the love and compassion of Christ for others. I love Sundays because they make for better Mondays; and Tuesdays and Wednesdays; a better week. Then Sunday rolls around again in God’s perfect timing for our lives and faith.

Let us pray with and for one another.

Isaiah 58:13-14

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, If you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, And if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land And to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.