

“EAT YOUR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES”

John 15:1-8 April 28, 2024

Most of us were raised with mothers who told us to “**eat your vegetables.**” In our family we ate salads, corn on the cob, green beans, peas, asparagus, watermelon, cantaloupe, and other good items. When I was younger, vegetables were my least favorite part of the meal, I ate them first to get them out of the way so I could enjoy the good stuff, usually the meat and potatoes.

It turns out once again that mom was right, eating our fruits and vegetables is good for you. **According to Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health**, a diet rich in vegetables and fruits can lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, prevent some types of cancer, lower the risk of eye and digestive problems, and have a positive effect upon blood sugar, which can help keep the appetite in check. Eating non-starchy vegetables and fruits like apples, pears, and green leafy vegetables may even promote weight loss.

Even if you don’t like certain vegetables or fruits, Brussel sprouts, there are at least 9 different families of fruits and vegetables to choose from, each with potentially hundreds of different plant compounds that are beneficial to health. It is recommended that we eat 5 daily portions of a variety of fruits and vegetables in order to give our bodies the mix of nutrients it needs.

It might surprise you to know Jesus was interested in healthy disciples too and he often used local plants in his stories to illustrate

points. On this occasion he chose to talk about grape vines. And this was not a random thought. Not only were grapes grown all over the country, but they were also a metaphor and symbol for Israel. Some of their money had vines printed on it. A golden vine was over the entrance to the Holy Place in the Temple. O.T. scripture frequently referred to Israel as a vine. **Why did the grapes stop in the middle of the road? Because they ran out of juice!** Just seeing if you were paying attention. My point is, the disciples knew about growing grapes, tending vines and their symbolism to Israel.

In John 15 Jesus gives his farewell speech to the disciples. Jesus gives instructions on how to follow him after he is physically removed from the earth. A change is about to take place and Jesus is preparing them for the next steps.

We can say the same about you communicants this morning. A change is about to take place as you become Members of the Church, with all the privileges and responsibilities of those who have been here a long time. Membership means you have a voice and a vote at meetings of the congregation, can hold office as allowed by the state, have gifts to share, can lead in worship, serve on committees, and participate fully in the life of the church. My question is what's next? This is only the beginning of your faith journey, not the end. How will you live out your faith in the community of faith? Well, to help you live out your discipleship I have three words of advice gleaned from John 15.

I. STAY CONNECTED - WHAT

The first is **stay connected**. Jesus said, “**Abide in me as I abide in you. I am the vine, and you are the branches.**” This passage is filled with relationship connections. Jesus uses the word “**abide**” 8 times within 8 sentences. He is urging his disciples to stay connected, specifically to himself.

You are all at that age of growing independence. You’re making more and more decisions, learning how to take care of yourself, choosing friends, discovering new interests, and pushing for further independence. I get that. But remember you did not get here all on your own. None of you were raised in a vacuum but within social contexts, by your connections.

Stay connected with the World and Community – In college, my favorite group of people were the international students. I met people from India, Brazil, Turkey, Greece, Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran, Mexico. I was exposed to cultures, languages, and people that challenged my understanding of the world and certainly gave a more informed view. Stay connected with the world and community to promote better understanding, to minister more effectively, and have greater compassion. Travel, listen to news, meet new people, ask questions listen, be stretched. USA is not the center of the world and God loves the entire world not just Hawley, PA.

Stay connected With your Family – You all come from great families. You are blessed in ways you don’t even realize yet. At times, your parents may seem strange, overbearing, or from another planet. But remember, they are your biggest fans, they lay down their lives for you, and they are here for you when everyone else walks away. Talk to them,

pray for them, serve them, keep learning from them. Friends come and go, but your family is forever. Stay connected.

With God and God’s Church – Jesus said, **“I am the True Vine”**. Jesus means he is the one from God who is the source of our life, our wellbeing, our purpose, and our salvation. Jesus is the real deal, the one who blesses us and meets our deepest need. There are many other vines out there that will lead you astray, use you, and spit you out. Stay connected to your church family who is here encourage, teach, and bless you. Stay connected to Jesus.

II. BEAR FRUIT – WHY?

In the last few years, I have not had good luck with my tomato plants. They usually start off great, then turn sickly, and only produce a couple of less than adequate tomatoes. I suspect they are not getting enough light, or the soil mix is off, or maybe these hybrid plants just aren’t cutting the mustard. It doesn’t mean I won’t keep trying, but it is very disappointing to do all the work of planting and care and still not get much fruit. Apparently, God feels the same way about us.

My second word to the young people is **BEAR FRUIT**. Jesus tells the disciples, **“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”** If you have ever wondered how to glorify and honor God, it is to bear fruit. What does he mean by bearing fruit?

Grow Up– into people of good **Character**, honest, compassionate, faithful, loving, reliable, hardworking, grateful people whose lives show the good news of Christ. **Second**, be fruitful by leading others to know

Jesus, the true vine. We always share what is good and most important to us, and what can be more important than introducing others to our Savior. **Thirdly**, bear fruit by blessing other people. Help solve problems instead of making problems, lift people out of poverty, comfort the sick and mourning, share what you have. In other words, be useful to God, to your family, and to your community. Be a blessing to others.

WARNING LABEL

In fact, Jesus issues a warning label to the disciples when he states, **“He removes every branch that bears no fruit.” “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”** Simply put, uselessness invites disaster. Stay connected. Trying to do life on your own invites disaster. Do something for your faith, for your church, for your community because of your faith in Christ. The Church is here to help you do that. Be useful and don’t be just a name in a membership role book.

III. SUNFLOWER PLANT – HOW

How do we stay connected and bear fruit? To answer that question, I would point us to the **sunflower plant**. Sunflowers in their early stage of life are **Heliotropic**, which means it is a plant that follows the sun. It will face east in the morning and west in the evening. Why do they do this? Because they are attracted to blue light, but more importantly by turning to the light the plants grow and mature.

Vines take work and attention to bear fruit and so does our faith. If we want to be useful fruit bearing vines, then like the sunflowers we

need to keep turning and following our light, Jesus Christ. We turn towards Jesus by:

1. **Teaching** – keep turning toward his teachings. This is a lifelong vocation of learning and living out the lessons and example of Christ's life. Don't neglect Christ's word.

2. **Pruning** – accept the pruning process. Jesus said, “**Every branch that bears fruit God prunes to make it bear more fruit.**” Pruning means letting God change you. It means letting God heal our hurts, practicing forgiveness, giving up certain distractions and habits, spending our time differently, making confession, repairing relationships, and working on our character flaws. God is pruning us so we become more Christ-like.

3. **Centering** – keep centering our lives in Jesus. That means bringing everything to Jesus; our decisions, plans, motives, relationships, attitudes, treasurers, with the desire to honor God in all that we do. Worship, service, and prayer all help us to center our lives in Christ.

When we meet each day, each problem, each opportunity, and each person with Christ then we stay connected, we bear fruit, and we live a life worth living. Like growing grapes, following Jesus takes some work, but the good news is God is at work in you, and your church is here to work alongside you. And don't forget to eat your fruits and vegetables, at least every now and then. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, April 28, 2024

Second Scripture Lesson

John 15:1-8

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.