

## Wesley Celebration

August 16, 2009

### Got Fruit?

This spring Christa and I tried something new, we tried to grow a vegetable garden. We both had never really done this before but we bought a book, talked to other people who have had successful gardens and thought hey we can do this. So, one Saturday morning we got up and I went and rented a rotor tiller and we prepared the soil, broke it up, and got into mounds ready to plant our vegetables. We were so excited- we were going to have tomatoes, green beans, zucchini, squash, carrots, and cucumbers. But the only thing we have harvested is two little tomatoes. The rest of our vegetables died, were eaten up by pests, or simply withered up and dried out. It was very sad for me; I had looked forward to reaping the harvest of my work. But it just didn't take; some say our soil wasn't good, others say that we watered too much, or we didn't use the right pesticides. It could be all of those are one or two but the point is there was no fruit- no produce.

Which can be the same for us as followers of Christ, if we are not connected to him as he describes in John 15: 1-8 then we will look like our garden which we have now called Auschwitz. We are either dead and dried up or producing no fruit like our one tomato plant. It is as tall as I am but has not produced one tomato. I have been told that I should have pruned it so that it would not keep growing foliage, but focus on actually growing a tomato. Let me read to you what Jesus was teaching his disciples and followers- I have mentioned many times where he uses parables or illustrations to get his point across and in this section it is no different. He uses the illustration of a vine, the vine dresser, and the branch which all of his followers could relate to because grapes were a life source for the people. They knew what went into a good harvest and crop. Here is what Jesus said, **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful."** We have these roses out front by our door and every once in awhile I will go out there and just hack away at them and when I am done I think well that should take care of it for awhile. I would say no later than a week after I do this, they are back growing stronger than ever. Just like the way Jesus explained that the father is the gardener and he prunes so that we will bear fruit. He has to get rid of the dead, dried out, and sometimes the unhealthy parts of us in order for us to do what we were created to do-bear fruit. How many of you can say that the gardener has pruned you in the last year? I know that God has had to cut off some things in my life that were painful and at the time I didn't know why they were happening. But now that I am further down the line I see where I have been able to grow more, trust him more, and see the fruit of the labor. But it wasn't easy, it never is but I know that when the pruning is over and the dust settles that it was done out of love for me and care just like a good gardener takes care of his garden.

Jesus goes on in verse 3 and following, **“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, and I will 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.”** Jesus also told the disciples that they could not bear fruit unless they remained connected. When we disconnect from the Jesus, we lose focus. We are lost. We are cut off from the life giving resource of God’s sustaining love. Our faith becomes weak and consequently we lose hope. How many of you could name people in your life that have cut themselves off from God because of the hurt they have felt from the church, its people, and Christianity? So, what do you do when you are left alone without guidance, hope, and true love?

They go looking to find answers and a sense of belonging, so they seek out all sorts of endeavors for security. They cling to vines that are false or short term. They reach out for vines fake vines that promise good things but don’t provide; or they cling to ones that simply exist in their imagination. They fill their lives with all these alternative vines but still come up empty and right back where they started lost and alone.

If we take a look at the last few verses in this passage I think we can find the real meat of what Jesus is trying to share with us. **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”** If we remain in him by staying connected through prayer, fellowship, reading the word- we will bear fruit. This to me is our purpose on this earth. We are here so that others, those that are lost and clinging to fake vines can finally find the truth and be set free. But how will they know about true vine, they will see the fruit we bear- they will see the peace, the joy, the love we have and want it too. But if we are not connected and try to figure life out on our own then we will be just like those that are lost. This is something that is easy to fall into because of the society we live in, we are taught from an early age to be independent, and we pride ourselves on being able to do things on our own. Sometimes this works but when the chips are down and life has tossed you around that’s when we really need to be connected. If you can think of all the people affected by Hurricane Katrina; people who lived next door to each other and never spoke were suddenly willing to risk their lives for each other to help each other during that horrific ordeal. We are not meant to do it alone if we do we will wither, dry up and be tossed into the fire because we are dead inside and out. Ezekiel said (ch. 15), that "a vine that cannot produce grapes is only good for burning."

His final lesson in verses 7 and 8 tell us, **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** Ask and it will be given to you, knock and the door will be open to you. Not just because he wants to bless us, which is true, but by praying and asking God we are demonstrating faith and when we share how God has blessed us, how he has answered our prayer, then we are able to show the fruit and give God the glory and honor he deserves.

I would like to invite April up to share a journey she and her family has been on the last month or so. (April speaks)

A true living example of God and his mercy, power, grace and promise; not only do we see fruit in Paul's testimony but we see it in April's and all those that have been praying for Paul.

So, now I ask you, where's your fruit? Are you like the branch that has tried to do it on its own and is now withered, dried and ready for the fire? Or are you the branch that has recently been pruned by the master Gardener in order to bear even more fruit? Or maybe you haven't found the vine yet? No matter where you are in your journey, you are not alone. You are in the right place tonight to get the nurturing you need after a good trim, or to find your way back to the vine. Or perhaps you have some fruit to share with the rest of us, who need to hear how God is moving. Regardless of where you are, I want to invite all of you to come and be nourished at the Lord's Table. This is not Wesley's table or a Methodist table but God's table and we are his children. Jesus commanded us to do this often to remember him as a way of proclaiming his death until he comes again. Let us take a moment to bow our head and our hearts and prepare them before we partake of the elements. (prayer)

**“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”**

Before you come and partake of this supper, if you are in need of prayer or have something on your heart and want to share it. I will be available to pray with you. I invite you now to come.