

***Pass It On -  
Our Life's Source***

**John 15:1-8**

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Most ancient Jews would have seen it. At one point or another in their lives they would have been close to it. At the temple in Jerusalem, one of the major carvings was a large cluster of grapes. When they came to worship they would have seen that cluster. And it would have got their imaginations flowing.

They'd have been reminded of the beginning of their nation - when, still in the desert, Israelite spies came back from the Promised Land lugging a large bunch of grapes on a pole.

And, if they were at all devout, they would remember the lines from their spiritual songbook, the Psalms, number 80 where the Psalmist says to God,

"You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land."

and they would know that this referenced their people.

Standing there, in front of the temple, the Jewish worshiper would recall words of the Hebrew prophets who compared Israel to a vine.

Like Hosea who said that "Israel was a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit" (10:1).

Or Jeremiah, who spoke God's word to Israel, "I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock..." (ch.2).

Or Isaiah who says much the same thing (ch 5).

Or Ezekiel (ch.15).

Yes, if you were a Jewish worshiper there at the temple, the symbol of a vine would be immediately identified with Israel. No question about it.

Which would cause a problem.

It would make you sit up with a questioning look on your face on that day

that day when Jesus was gathered around the Last Supper table with his disciples.

There, at that table, Jesus makes some statements about the vine.

Which you'd figure, quite rightly, would point to Israel.

But listen to what he says.

Very unexpected!

### **JOHN 15:1-17, p. 109 (New Testament)**

Do you get it that those who were listening to Jesus would have had to think long and hard about the claims that Jesus was making?

Perhaps you do, too.

In fact, I suggest that you think about them carefully.

They are not "whatever" kind of words.

They are words that, if you accept them, can change the way you conduct your life.

They can shape the core of your spiritual activity.

The central Old Testament message is that the nation of Israel is God's chosen means to bring life and blessing to all nations of the earth. The world would connect to God through the people of Israel. The world would experience the smile and pleasure and blessing of God through Israel. The physical world would connect to heavenly reality through Israel - the planted and precious vine of God.

Jesus picks that whole idea up and drops it in the shredder.

He says, "Don't look to a particular geographical area or to a certain ethnic group to find God's blessing.

Look to me.

Because **I AM** God's vine."

**I AM** -

If you could read the original Greek language in which John's gospel was written, you'd see that **I AM** uses the strongest possible grammar.

There's no room for doubt.

And there's no other option.

It's a pretty intense statement, don't you find?

I am **THE** way that the world can connect to God.

I am **THE** one through whom you can experience the smile and pleasure and blessing of God.

I am **THE** one who can provide you with a channel to heaven's energy, heaven's power, heaven's love.

**I am** the fulfillment of everything that carving in the temple represents, says Jesus.

That statement is, quite frankly, right at the centre of Jesus' whole mission.

It is central to everything he's about.

If you want to deal Jesus into your spiritual life, these are the terms.

You have to choose to accept or reject them.

And that's an active choice that each of us has to make.

Have you made yours?

Central to the whole business is the message of verse 5:

*I 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.*

Jesus is claiming that the only positive, fruitful sort of spirituality is one that is intimately connected to him.

*Apart from me you can do nothing.*

Nothing.

Not - *a little*

Not - *sporadic*

Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

Jesus is unequivocal.

That's true for us each on our own spiritual journeys.  
It's also true for spiritual communities, like us here at Calvin Church.  
There is no spiritual significance in us being an institution that carries out certain regular religious rituals. There is nothing eternally valuable from social actions or moral pronouncements or fellowship gatherings.

Not by themselves.

Not in the heavenly realms, anyway.

Apart from a connection to Jesus none of these things matter.  
No spiritual power flows in any of these apart from them being connected to Jesus.

If we wander from our deep dependence upon, and intimate connection to Jesus, we are wandering away from the significance, the power and the very life that this community of believers has.

We will be left with ***nothing***.

So..... as a gathered community let's begin this new season recognizing this:  
We are never "Jesus AND..." something else.  
We are not "Jesus OR..." whatever other spiritual option, as though all are equal.

Here it is - on the record.

The spiritual family here at Calvin Church is fully and totally about Jesus.

End of story.

v.5 again: *Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear much fruit.....*

What is it to abide in Christ?

*To abide* is not about any sort of mysterious spiritual technique or fancy religious ritual.

Rather, it's a relationship word.

It's a long-term kind of word.

*To abide* means "*living together*."

To abide in Christ means to make room for him in our lives, not just as a guest who is along for the ride of whatever lifestyle we happen to choose for ourselves, but as an as a permanent resident whose opinions matter more than anyone else's;

we listen for that opinion

and then we allow that opinion to shape the way we act.

Actually, there's no real secret about how to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.  
It's not any different than having a relationship with anyone else close and important to you.

Last week I sat down with a couple thinking about getting married. They shared with me how they met and how have been getting to know each other.

Want to know what they've been doing?

Talking together.

Spending time just hanging out with each other.

And doing stuff that the other person enjoys; to make the other person happy.

Those three things have helped them get "*into*" each other and get ready for spending the rest of their lives living with each other.

To keep a relationship vital, you have to stay in touch and in tune with each other.

Speak to each other.

Listen to each other.

And act on what you hear from each other.

You can't have a relationship with someone close to you if you keep living counter to what you know is important to them.

If your wife really puts a premium on you being home on time for dinner, then constantly running late is not going to do your marriage much good.

If your business partner is convinced that careful management of finances is important, then regularly going out to purchase stuff without consulting each other will lead to tension in your partnership.

Do you notice these things mentioned here in John 15?

Jesus invites us to begin, and grow in a long-term relationship with him.

Verse 7 talks about his words remaining in us. And it mentions us talking back to him in prayer.

Verse 10 speaks about obeying his commandments, and in that way abiding in his love.

That's it.

Nothing wierd or mysterious about it.

**AND**

Nothing that is beyond our reach.

In fact, the one taking the biggest step, reaching the furthest, is Jesus himself.

In Jesus' time, people understood God to be situated in the sphere of holiness, of purity and only a pure one was allowed to get in touch with him.

Jesus assures his followers that they HAVE that privilege of connecting with God.

They are, through Him, ALREADY pure.

Simply by accepting His Word into their lives, he makes them pure.

No huge steps we have to take. No large projects we have to complete.

No gold medal, Olympic standard of religious perfection that we have to first achieve.

V.3: *You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.*

It's done.

It's already done for Jackson, before he could even so much as lift a finger or grasp the first tiny bit that Jesus loves him, this we know, for the bible tells us so.

It's there, and done for each of us.

We don't have to earn our way into having that connection with heaven.

Jesus prepares and delivers it.

That, too, we need to remember as we start another season.

Lest we slip and begin to think that somehow our performance dictates our standing with heaven.

When it comes to the relationship with Jesus, and the connection to heaven's power that he gives, all we do is receive it, and live it.

Period.

If we get too worried about performance, the relationship actually starts to deteriorate. Because we become so focused on **doing** that we don't spend time **being**.

Married couples that have the strongest relationships are the ones who make sure that in the midst of all the rhythms of life that they spend time together - just **being** together.

If they let all the tasks of their home and family and jobs and stuff consume their time they actually start to drift apart. And one day, surprise, they sit across the dinner table from each other and realize with a shock that they hardly know each other.

Friends, make sure that this season, in the midst of all the necessary tasks of home and school and church and the like -

- make sure you build in time to savor and grow your relationship with Jesus.

I invite you to let worship here be part of that.

As one person put it recently, think of your worship time as having a weekly date with him.

Time set aside for each other where no tasks or phone calls or whatever can get in the way.

Build in personal quiet time into your daily routine, too.

And then, when opportunities come to pass along the affirmation and love and care that Jesus provides you

when opportunities come to pass that along to others, jump at the chance.

Because those kind of opportunities tend to be the setting for showing a lot of the fruit that Jesus talks about.

In the Old Testament the fruitfulness of Israel as the Vine of God was measured by how they lived with justice and care for the weak, the voiceless, the stranger, the needy.

It should come as no surprise that things don't change in the New Testament.

Here in John 15 Jesus summarizes it by simply telling us to pass the love along.

If you want a more detailed explanation of what that looks like, see Matthew 25.

Welcome in a stranger.

Give food to the hungry.

Help provide shelter to the homeless.

Advocate for those caught in prison.

Speak up for those that society doesn't listen to.

You see it, don't you?

Abiding in Christ involves other people.

Which really ought be no surprise.

After all - I don't know of any vine that has only one branch;  
the branch of **me**.

Vines have many branches.

Close together.

Sharing the sap and life from the vine.

Pollinating and producing fruit together.

The spirituality that Jesus advocates is not about me chasing my own self-fulfillment. It is not about finding my own way, or doing my own mystical thing.

Rather, the spirituality of Jesus  
is corporate,  
is life lived in community.

Meaning that this season you'll receive invitations to spend time with other spiritual pilgrims, with other people who have signed on to an apprenticeship with Jesus.

to play with them

and study with them

and pray with them

and worship with them

and serve with them.

Please take advantage of those invitations!

Don't just turn them down because you don't feel like it.

Or because you don't see how you will personally find immediate gain from it.

Or because it may be somewhat of an inconvenience.

What you'll be saying "NO" to are potentially very fruitful experiences.

You'll be saying "NO" to potential moments to experience Jesus' presence amid the presence of those other believers.

So:

1. Make intentional relationship space in your daily and weekly routines for Jesus, the Vine of God.

2. Make intentional space for others in your spiritual life.

And finally,

point 3 - get ready for challenges and even painful experiences to come your way.

You've probably noticed it.

And if you're a gardener you understand.

Fruit doesn't grow if you don't prune.

I was in my raspberry patch a couple of days ago.

For a variety of reasons I haven't been able to spend much time there this season. Just didn't happen.

And so, while there was a bit of fruit, most of the berries of the Fall crop were small. And there weren't very many.

The dead wood hadn't been trimmed out.  
Tops hadn't been clipped back properly.  
Stuff was too close together and tangled.  
Weeds were clogging up the soil and sucking away precious nutrients.

You got to prune.  
When we lived in Simcoe County there was an apple orchard across the road.  
Every February and March the farmer's crew would bring their saws and start cutting.  
The first year I thought they were destroying the trees.  
It was **amazing** how much they cut away.  
Of course, they knew exactly what they were doing.  
And by September there were all sorts of beautiful apples hanging ripe from the branches.  
Down the road was an abandoned orchard. No painful pruning happened to those trees.  
They got to live free and easy, growing just the way they wanted and felt like growing.  
There weren't many apples on the trees.  
And what apples there were, were small and often mis-shapen.

Those of you that choose to follow the spiritual life offered by Jesus, get ready for some pruning to happen.

Get ready.

And be aware that pruning is not self-indulgent, self-focused, self-centred.

It is self-denying.  
It is painful.  
It takes away in order that more may come.  
It removes so that there may be growth.  
That's pruning.

I suspect that for each of us, and perhaps for us as a spiritual community,  
There may be experiences that are less than comfortable.  
Moments that may be rather stretching or demanding.  
Times when you want to run in the other direction.

There may be occasions where you **feel** like doing one thing but **know** in your heart that God is calling you to do another.

Those are pruning moments.  
Just because it costs, because it is a stretch, or because it isn't what you first of all want  
don't immediately shy away from it!

There may be more gain, at the end, than pain.  
The result will be worth the cost.  
It will make you a more fruitful follower of Jesus.  
And more robust in your relationship with Him.