

To Keep You From Falling Away

John 15:26-16:4

Our text for the morning's meditation is the Gospel lesson read earlier and recorded for us by the Evangelist St. John.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a phrase in our text for today, "I have said all these things to keep you from falling away." We might be tempted to think that Jesus is referring only to words recorded for us in this text, and the rest of His words recorded immediately previous to our text. Well, that is not exactly so. In order to get a more complete understanding of what Jesus has said to keep us from falling away, I would like to read to you what He said in this conversation before the words of our text.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

Jesus is not simply speaking about those gathered with Jesus, He is speaking about you. He says **you** are a branch that has been grafted into the True Vine. Last week, at St. Peter, Charlotte was grafted into the True Vine, baptized into Christ. You also are baptized into Christ, into His death and into His resurrection. Branches receive everything from the vine in which they live. Whatever is Christ's, is yours. All that you are, all that you do, ***everything about your life of faith***, is that which is wrought in you by God through Jesus Christ.

When you know that it is all about the vine, then your life as a branch is easy. Your joy is made full, for it is Christ who abides in you. As a branch living in the True Vine today, you keep Christ's commandment. It is why you are here today – to do just that. You are gathered in this place so that you might hear, so that you might eat, and so that you might drink, just as He commands. That is how you abide in His love, and how His love abides in you. But let us continue with more of Jesus' monologue before our text.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.”

You and I are to love one another. Why? Because He chose you! You did not choose Him, you did not come to Him, you did not decide to follow Him. Jesus chose you. He appointed you to go and bear fruit. And the fruit you are to bear, is to love one another. How do you love one another? Just as He has loved you, by laying down your life for your friends.

In other words, you give up yourself for your friends. (By the way, Jesus also says in other places that you are to love your enemies. If you have love your enemies, you have no enemies – if you have no enemies, then all are your friends.) How do you love your friends? You sacrifice yourself for them. Even when you could get your pound of flesh for how they have hurt you, you forgive them. You lay down your life for your friends and love them, you willingly choose to do for others no matter what they may do for you.

But, this is not something you have within yourself. This is something you receive from without, it is what you receive from Christ. You are grafted into the True Vine, it Christ who gives forgiveness to you. This gift of forgiveness that has been paid for with the very blood of Christ on the cross, He delivers to the living branches – it is delivered to you as you hear, eat, and drink Christ.

Jesus continues His monologue.

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’

My friends, were you listening closely? You will be hated for the name of Jesus. If you were of the world, the world would love you. There are many who find it easier to be of the world. It is easy to go along with the ways of the world, for nobody likes to be hated. It is appealing to agree with worldly views about things.

The world says: Go ahead, make that bootleg CD, put together that playlist from music you didn’t pay for, it isn’t like anybody is really going to find out that you have it. Musicians make millions, it isn’t stealing.

The world says: Marriage is old fashioned, as long as we’re in love, we do not need to follow that God’s rules. Just forget the fact that God calls His church His bride and Himself the bridegroom. Don’t think about marriage as God’s gift to a man and a woman because it is His idea of marriage, and more importantly, a reflection of God’s relationship to His bride the church. The world is wiser and understands “sexuality” better.

Turn on your TV or listen to the radio, you will never hear the “F” word, but blasphemy abounds – God’s name is used in vain all over the place. And well-

intentioned Christians fall in with the world, “Oh my God” is a phrase that slips off the tongue without thinking. Does the world hate you, or are you of the world?

How easy it is to be of the world! What vile names do you call people, people who were purchased for forgiveness with the same blood Christ shed for you? Who is it that you refuse to forgive? How does the world justify such behavior and attitudes toward others? They did me dirt first. As long as I do not do anything illegal to them, I do not need to forgive, God understands.

Yes, God does understand how people treat one another. Jesus understands it very well. He just got done explaining how well He understands. He knew how they would persecute Him – whip Him, beat Him, scorn Him, crucify Him. As they would do to Him, so also will they persecute the Vine, so also the branches.

If we fit in in the world, and I only gave just a taste of a few things, are we really of Christ? In how many other ways do we slip into our “fit-in-with-the-world” mode so we can be loved by the world? How often do we succumb to temptation and fall away from Christ?

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."

Dearly beloved of God, Jesus said all these things to keep you from falling away. It is He who sends the Spirit to us to bear witness about Him. Why? As He proclaimed in our Gospel lesson a couple weeks ago, to convict us of our sin, and to convict us of our righteousness!

Why does the world try to excuse all that behavior? Because it hates Jesus! Worldly thinking is that we are all OK, that we do fine on our own. We do not need someone to save us from our sin, for I am not a sinner.

Those who do not see their need for a Savior, are not convicted of their sin and repentant, are mocking Christ. The impenitent are saying that the cat-o-nine tails, the crown of thorns, the nails, and the rough wood of the cross were all unnecessary. Impenitence is laughing at Christ's suffering and calling it foolishness.

Left on our own, we'd fall into the same thinking. If we were not branches, firmly rooted in the True Vine, we would be like the rest of the world. So, Christ says all this to keep us from falling away. He reminds us of the struggles we will face living in the world, but also that it is He who overcame the world – for you.

Christ did all we are unable to do in regard to following the will of the Father. But He has also chose us to be His own. He grafted us into Himself – uniting us to Himself and Him to us. It is He who comes to us still to forgive us, and renew us in the true faith.

We are witnesses to what Christ has done – and is still doing. For it is the Word of Christ which still comes to us to keep us from falling away.

Christ commands, Hear my word – and we fall into the forgiveness He speaks into our ears.

Christ commands, Eat my flesh – and we dine on the finest fare, being filled and strengthened in Christ to face all the challenges of this world.

Christ commands, Drink my blood – and we are refreshed for life in the desert wilderness of temptation.

It is the Word made flesh is the one who keeps us from falling away. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus the Word of life. Amen.