



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Christ is Risen. . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Recently there have been many incidents of issues with airplanes. Not sure I am wanting to fly anytime soon with wings tearing off, flat tires, engines failing and close calls of collisions on the ground. So, when I read this story this week as I was studying, by Pastor Vince Gerhardy thought it would be a good one to share.

A four-engine jetliner is halfway to its destination when the pilot's voice comes across the loudspeaker, which is never all that loud. "Those of you on the left side of the plane have probably noticed that one of our four engines has failed. Please, don't be alarmed. We can still fly safely with three engines but will probably arrive about 30 minutes late."

A few minutes later the pilot's calm voice was heard again; "Those of you on the right side of the plan are probably aware that a second engine has failed. Please don't be alarmed. We can make it on two engines, though we will be at least an hour late now."

A few minutes later the pilot spoke to the passengers: "It has just come to my attention that a third engine has failed. Please don't be alarmed. We can make it to the airport on one engine. However, we will arrive approximately 90 minutes late."

One passenger turned to another and said, "Boy, I hope that the fourth engine does not fail, or we could be up here all night."

Those passengers traveling on that plane were completely dependent on the mechanics who service the plan's engines and on the expertise of the pilot. They totally relied on a machine that was way too heavy to be flying through the air by itself. The plane would come down if there is a mechanical, electrical or computer failure. And it might not be an easy landing.

So how many times do we have to trust that others will keep us safe and make our lives easier. When I go out to eat, I have to rely on the waitress and the chef to know what gluten is and keep it off my plate. When I pushed down the button on the toaster in the morning, I trust that the manufacturer has put the components together correctly to toast my bread and not start my house

on fire. In the olden days, I trusted the filling station attendant to put the right gas in my car, when I said, "Fill er up!" And last but certainly not least and because of a great sale, I trusted the manufactures of the rubber nuggets we are going to use in the playground area, that they will deliver them after May 1<sup>st</sup>. So how many people in a day do you suppose you trust. We trust others to do their job so that we can live safe and happy lives.

John's Gospel today tells us in verse 5 that "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." To me this is pretty clear that our relationship with Jesus, our abiding in Him is the key both to our fruitfulness and to our destiny. To put it this way, Christians find strength and purpose through relationship with Christ. The weak person becomes strong when grafted onto the Christ-vine and the strong person becomes vulnerable when detached from it.

And then Jesus goes on with the vine allegory where God is the vine grower, Christ is the vine, the disciples are the branches and those who do not abide in Christ are useless branches. Jesus often uses the vine or a vineyard in his teaching because it was familiar to the Israelites. Actually, there were many references to vineyards in the Old Testament, however they were usually negative. Everywhere people walked there were vineyards; many were owners of vineyards or worked in them. They came to know that the vines needed pruning. Dead branches were cut off and destroyed and good branches were trimmed to make the vine put more energy into producing more and better fruit, i.e., grapes. This may be thought of as cruel to the plant, but it actually renews the vine's vitality. With the dead branches gone the energy can go into the branches that remained.

Since Frank brought me his 50 or so plants, from his non-profit, when he moved to Las Vegas, I have seen this process at work. Cutting back some branches that look a little sickly makes the plant grow better either with more branches or more leaves. I am sure that you have found this true in your own gardens. What are they called "suckers" on your tomato plants? And I know that you are just itching to get out in these next few weeks.

So, gardening today is still, even for us in the north woods of Wisconsin a good allegory. But what do we get from this story that Jesus is telling us, his disciples. We understand that God is the planter and that we have the Holy Spirit planted in us at our baptism. Jesus came to tend to us as the vine grower and we are the products of his vine, who we are and what we do in this world.

One of the things I learned over time is that we all need pruning. God prunes us to bear fruit and more fruit. He gets rid of what is dead weight and, in our way, when he removes the branches and leaves that are not productive. Giving us the gifts, we need to produce what He desires for us. Pruning is a good thing for us but often times it is hard to swallow.

In my own life Jesus pruned me, big time. He cut me to the quick and although it was a very hard time, I did recover. When I was the council president at St Olaf, my home church. I felt that I was doing many good things. I was part of a team that got a food pantry going. I was involved in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, and I was going to LSTC, Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago to be an associate in ministry, or deaconess as they call them today. I felt the call to do something more for God and the church and so I felt called to be in Word and Service ministry in the ELCA. Well, I found a job after I was approved as a Deaconess. I worked in a very large church as the education director. However, when I asked to be called to that position the Bishop called me to his office and told me that was not where the church needed me. He told me to go back to seminary and be a pastor. My gut told me that he was right, but what a blow. It would take much more education to

be a pastor. How could I do that and where would I ever find a call. Who would want 56-year-old woman as a pastor?

Well, even though this was quite a pruning experience, the Holy Spirit showed me the clear way to do what God was asking me to do. It made me stronger to follow God's true call and I am here today because of that wonderful pruning Bishop. It hurt for a while, but that is how God helps us be who He created us to be. God certainly is the vine in my life and has led me to have a beautiful and fulfilling life of serving an amazing congregation with Word and Sacrament ministry. Together I hope we can continue to do great ministry and bear much fruit together.

And so, after our pruning, of all the experiences both good and bad that we have had in our lives, we are called in this Gospel to be fruit bearing. This week our congregational president Kurt and I talked a bit about what more we can do in this community to make it a better place for the residents. The Lord's Cupboard and the Sleep in Heavenly Peace ministries are a good start. Where else can we make a difference and most of all where can we share the love of God in Christ Jesus with others? So, keep brainstorming where we can serve God either collectively or individually.

You might have noticed I read more of the Gospel than the text assigned for the day in our bulletin. I want us to think about this idea of abiding a bit more. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Verse 5. Abiding in God, Jesus makes clear that our relationship with him is the key both to our fruitfulness and to our destiny. We find strength and purpose through our relationship with Jesus. That is what abiding is all about. To continue in a particular relationship with Jesus. To remain and stay faithful in that relationship. Remember what you learned in Confirmation class, I hope. About the commandments. The first three are about our relationship with God and the last 7 are about our relationship with others. That is how we are to live our lives. We are to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, as it is simplified in the message of the New Testament. These extra verses, if you will, tell us just that! We are to abide in God's love just as God loved us when he sent His only son to die on the cross for us and rise again to give us the gracious gifts of forgiveness, abundant life, and salvation. This is Jesus' command. I also love the idea that Jesus tells us this, "so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." WOW.

Our true joy comes from being attached to the vine: created by and connected to God, pruned to be the best version of ourselves, and bearing fruit and God's love, all as we continue to abide in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, will you commit to these disciplines that God is calling us too? To be of service to God, to be of service to others, while caring for who God made you to be, is what it means to abide in Jesus as His disciple. Love God and loving your neighbor as yourself is a huge calling that we all continue to work on day in and day out. Folks this is where our joy comes from: Being attached to the God our vine and bearing good fruit by serving our neighbors.

This morning we have the joy of receiving new members into our congregation. Please greet them warmly during coffee hour and listen to the language we will use to accept them as they show their desire to join our vineyard and bear fruit with us.

Amen

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