

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Branches” (from the “We ARE” sermon series)

Scripture: John 15:1-8 (Jesus the True Vine)

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of John, Jesus is teaching the parable of the vine and branches. The heart of the message is that “I (Jesus) am the true vine” and to be a productive branch that produces fruit you must believe in Christ (the true vine).
- In verse 1, Jesus says that He is the “true vine.” For historical context, farmers in this part of the ancient world (Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, etc.) grew vines for wine making, viticulture and viniculture.
- Historically, vines are used as metaphors for Israel in the Old Testament. In Psalms 80:8-1-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15: 1-6; 17:5-10; and 19:10-14, we see Israel as the grapevine with God as the “vine grower” or the “gardener” that tends to the vine and destroys it if the vine becomes unfaithful (or does not “bear fruit”).
- In verses 4-7, Jesus mentions a few different times His command to “remain in Me” or “abide in Me,” in regard to us being able to “bear fruit.” Jesus is the source of our bearing fruit and our identity as a church body. Jesus’ disciples are to bear fruit by being faithful to Him or be “...thrown away like a branch and wither; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” (Verse 5) Thus, if we abide in Christ, we will bear fruit.
- In verses 8-11, we see that bearing fruit is the outward sign of discipleship. This is doing works of love, which are mirrored from the Father’s love in Jesus and Jesus’ love for His disciples. We, as Christ’s disciples and community are to mirror this love through our good works and actions.
- Finally, verses 12-17 focus on Christ’s commandment for us: “...that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Here, we see that friendship is defined by Jesus’ love and this love is to be shared by each one of us.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- As we conclude the “We ARE” sermon series, we have been reflecting about identity: who we are as offspring of God, who we are as sons and daughters and disciples of Christ.
- We have a tendency to categorize ourselves, and one another, in order to divide rather than reconcile (see 1 John 4:20).
- Confusion of identity can lead to perplexity of purpose. When you find your *why*, you find your *way*. The church exists to help us (as community) to find your why and way.
- As early as Genesis, we learn that we are created in the image of God. St. Athanasius taught: “Every human life is a portrait of God. Because of sin, these portraits become blurred and tarnished. Rather than discarding these portraits, God has sent His Son to sit as a model for the second painting. The incarnate Son gives us a clear image of the divine so that the original image is restored.”
- In today’s text, the Old Testament often described Israel as a vineyard. The vine became the symbol of Israel, however, with the passage of time this image became tarnished.
- In the New Testament, Jesus refers to Himself as the “true vine.” He adds that His Father is the “vinedresser” and that the key to branches bearing fruit depends on maintaining its connection to the vine. Jesus is our connection to God.
- Scripture teaches that we do not *produce* fruit, rather, we *bear* fruit. Producing fruit is about my work for God. Bearing fruit is about God’s work in me.
- For context, this section of John comes on the eve of Christ preparing His friends for His physical absence. The question underneath the text is how can the disciples keep going in the absence of Jesus? How can the church continue her mission? It comes to one word: abide (v.4). Abide means to stick with something. Not giving up! Stay connected and stay attached to something.
- Our capacity to be faithful and fruitful depends upon about sticking with Christ and one another.
- “Longtermism”: the idea that nothing of much value happens in a hurry.
- With Christ, all things are possible. When we stay connected and abide, remain and stick with it, the fruit will grow for the glory of the vinedresser and for the good of humanity.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- How do you define a relationship marked by mutual love? How does this align with or differ from what Christ teaches?
- What kind of “fruit” are Christians called to produce?
- Scripture teaches that we do not *produce* fruit, rather, we *bear* fruit. What is the difference? Can you think of examples of this?
- Consider the discussion on the word *abide*. Can you think of a time when you committed yourself to sticking to something (an event, relationship, etc.), regardless of how challenging it was? What did you do? How did (or didn’t you) see it through? What would you do differently?



NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook or legal stationery. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.