

The Rev'd Mike Waltner
02 May 2021 - Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 15.1-8

Jesus's words to his disciples describes himself as the true vine. It is through him that our lives are connected to his saving power and all of us, each of us gathered in the church are described as branches call to bear fruit which is being cultivated by the Father.

I have a garden, but unfortunately, I am not a very good gardener. I am sure that I do not get as much out of the fruit-bearing plants that I tend, when I tend to them, as I should.

My initial expectations, because I was so uninformed and knew so little, was that gardens just happened. You put some plants or seeds in the soil, water them sporadically, and visit them a couple times during the season, and Voilà! Fruit! But it does not work that way.

I have learned in recent years that gardening is a laborious task which takes patience, attentiveness in the form of nurturing care, and constancy—all things that I need improve if I am ever to have a fruit yielding garden.

My main point here is that for most fruit bearing plants, you really can't just leave the plant, cross your fingers, hoping it will yield good fruit. It needs to be cultivated. There is the preparation of knowing what the plant needs, what kind of soil it requires, of ensuring there is a proper acidity, and nutrients, making sure you think ahead to schedule watering regularly, not too much or too little, and then there is almost always, I believe, early on some degree of strategically, cutting certain plants back, or pruning.

The act, of pruning if done correctly. Makes the plant able to bear more fruit, in many cases much more fruit.

I find pruning to be difficult, it requires judgement and discernment, the cutting that is done initially may make the plant look like is dying, causing one to question how much can be cut away without the damaging the stem or the vine. But if done correctly and strategically, pruning will allow the energy and nutrients within the plant to be directed to the flourishing of more fruit.

So, moving on from my tortured example, of my poor garden: What I have taken from our reading today is that bearing fruit is requires something from us. To bear fruit, we also need to be prepared, to sacrifice as Jesus described, to be pruned by the vine-grower, the Father.

As church gathered together, there is much fruit we are called to bear. Each of us has been called to be cultivated in the faith, to bring forth fruit that God makes possible for us.

You probably have already heard that Christ Church is in the midst a stewardship campaign. Stewardship is a duty of all disciples, and like gardening, it too requires preparation, sacrifice and planning, and always a certain kind of cutting a way what is not productive, to make place for directing our resources, our energies, toward fruit-bearing purposes.

The finances of the church, of this community, must be tended to if the church is to be sustained, and hopefully grow and to thrive, into the future. This is not an issue that we can push to tomorrow. It really must be addressed with now.

We have endured some difficult weather: COVID-19 has damaged our financial situation, and to adjust, we have worked to continue to keep people connected: the clergy, the council, lay

leadership, and you as a congregation, and while it has been a difficult and challenging time. While the losses to the Church have not been catastrophic, and we are all thankful to those who have increased their giving through this time, but even though we have survived, the COVID epidemic has had an impact on our church and the like. In so many other areas life, it has exposed some serious vulnerabilities.

For us to move forward, we must recommit ourselves to caring financially for our church. This can be done by making a spiritual commitment, to planned giving, to contribute to growing the body of Christ.

We must always keep in focus during this time the importance of abiding in Christ who connects us to the Father, the vine grower. Remaining connected to him is vital, for each of our individual lives and our shared life as a church. There can be no health in our church if we are not abiding in Christ and seeking that he abides in us. If not, there can be no real flourishing in our lives or in our church. No amount of fundraising, strategizing, or planning will matter without this.

Our gospel reading today reaches us at a time where we are being called to take a serious look at our lives and what we have to offer to life of the church, what we have to contribute to its life. And yes, this means financially.

The Bazaar and the Church Shop are not answer to the fill the gap in our finances. The answer must come from us, from our response and our willingness to give back to God who has done so much for us. Therefore, we are encouraging people to sign up to participate in planned giving. To make a commitment to supporting the church over the long term.

For Christ Church to truly flourish, we must continue to seek to abide with Christ, to keep ourselves grafted to him, to commit collectively and individually to him. Jesus calls us to see ourselves, each of us, as a branch that is meant to bear fruit. Each of us is called to allow God to search out those parts of lives that may need to be pruned back to make the bearing of fruit more abundant.

Like any good, or in my case not-so-good, gardener knows, some things will need to be sacrificed and redirected for this plant, this church, to continue to bear fruit: sacrificial giving, great and small. And we all realize that for some of us, even a small contribution may be a great sacrifice. We understand that, and we know from Scripture that God honours such giving. It is significant and does bear fruit and so we honour and greatly appreciate that sacrifice.

If you have not already, please consider signing up for planned giving, and commit to supporting the Church. If you are already giving, we ask that you please seriously consider increasing your contribution.

If we remain connected to the vine of Christ, we trust that God will continue to allow us reap fruits for us and for future generations to enjoy.