

May 3 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 23

I John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

Sermon *Abiding In Jesus*

You know it is pretty amazing what can be done with an apparently worthless object if those worthless objects are placed in the right hand. As a child I used to go with my best friend, Eric to visit his uncle's orchard in Chelan, an apple country. One day I noticed this little pile of sticks sitting off to the side, they looked ordinary enough not much different from ones that any of us might collect over the course of summer in our yard. But my friend's uncle reached down and took up one of the sticks and he explained that these plain looking sticks were going to be grafted into hardy trees where they could do some good. And sure enough in a few years later the sticks became a part of the living part of those trees which produced beautiful red delicious apples. To be productive the barren lifeless looking sticks just needed to be properly connected, properly grafted to a source of sustenance.

So it is with us as human beings as well. We need to be rightly connected; we need to be grafted so to speak in order to receive the sustenance that we need for a life that is full, life that is productive. There are possibilities which can never be realized for any of us if we are not connected to the source which enables those possibilities to develop. And let me say that not only once or twice we cannot make it happen alone. We can't make it happen alone. Now you and I both know we certainly have many capabilities that we can control and lots of talents that we can develop but to become genuinely fruitful followers of Jesus it is beyond our ability to do it all by ourselves. In order for that to happen we have to depend on another and that other is Jesus the True Vine which we as branches have to be connected with. And that is not a truth to which we want to admit though in our text Jesus said, "Whoever abides in me bears much fruit but apart from me you can do nothing". We want to protest day in and day out many times a day "Oh come on Jesus all of that is pretty farfetched, surely there are lots of things we can do on our own all by ourselves." But even though we may accomplish a lot of things apart from Jesus, a lot of things from apart from God, our accomplishments, don't hold a candle to what we could do with Jesus help. The things that we do, the talents we have, the goals we attain will be short lived if we are separated from the source that can sustain us in the midst of life. And apart from God, apart from Jesus even good things can become tainted and our action of service can become a danger of

becoming opportunities for pride to creep in or the manipulation of others to creep in or resentment to creep in or even self glorification to creep in. How much more effective we are as the followers of Jesus when we remain tentative and responsive to the pattern of Jesus life as we trust Jesus to connect us daily to God. To abide in Jesus means we draw our life from the one who is especially connected with the ultimate source our whole life and so when we live and when we love, when we serve and we give in Jesus' name matters more than just this one moment in time. It is all a part of a life lived in communion with God. And when we live by drawing our substance from God in this way our lives express something of the very nature of God to anybody that we meet around us. The Holy Spirit flows through us producing those fruits that I mentioned before with Galatians 5, love, joy peace patience kindness generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control If we abide in Jesus as branches to the vine we realize we are connected all, we are also connected to our brothers and sisters in Jesus in a special way as well. The love which is in Jesus is the love for all of us. We cannot love God without sharing that love to those in the chairs next to us in this sanctuary today but also people far beyond the doors of this place and far beyond the reaches of this community. This love which we derive from God is not just some gushy feeling that we have for each other; I like gushy feeling but not just that. It calls for substantial action in the midst of life as well. Jesus said later on in John 15, "You didn't choose me, I chose you. I appointed you to go and bear fruit". That is a bold statement on the part of Jesus There appears to be very little room for negotiation in the statement, Jesus simply says you belong to me and you will bear fruit. On one level that's not difficult for us to understand. If we return to the first image that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches we demonstrated by dragging embarrassed people around the sanctuary this morning. The job of the branches is to bear fruit, it is that simple. The branch is no good if it doesn't bear fruit. We don't ask an apple if it wants to bloom and produce an apple. We expect fruit every year even if that fruit is in varying quality and quantity. At the same time we expect an apple to produce an apple. I am sure you have been surprised before what came out on your tree. It would be silly for us to plant corn and expect oats; a grapevine is expected to produce grapes. Jesus expects that we as sisters and brothers will produce fruit and that fruit will be Jesus himself,' the fruit that Jesus speaks of later on in John 15 as well, for Jesus commanded his people to love one another as they have been loved by Jesus. In another verse Jesus said he speaks these things to us so that our joy might be full. So joy and love as St. Paul reminded us in Galatians 5 are to be two major hallmarks of the Christian faith, hallmarks of the fruit that we produce and I will give a double one here and they are not optional. They are not optional. Jesus says this is the way that things will be so followers of Jesus live a life love and joy is as natural as expecting an apple tree to produce apples.

So we are chosen by God and there are few things as precious as being chosen. Remember as kids of being chosen for a ball team, I was always last. How exciting it is to be chosen for a promotion at work or chosen by that partner or spouse that you spent some of your life with. We have been chosen by no one less than by God. For those of us that are chosen it is inspiring part of our faith but beyond that as I said before been chosen for love and joy. We, Christians, we are asked, no, as I said before, we are expected to show love and joy as we relate to the world where God has placed us. I don't have to tell you that is a tall order as we face the larger difficulties of the world as represented in the city of Baltimore this week or the devastation in places like Nepal. Love and Joy are often the first things to go out the window in the face of such crisis but Jesus reminds us these things, "I have spoken to you that joy may be in you and your joy may be full". I wonder if that sounds like any Christian person you know. Does it sound like you? We can't deny that a good part of our faith is also taking up one's cross and some sacrifice but I think that is only a partial picture of what faith is all about. The other side of the coin is the Jesus the one, who was able to hold on the deep and abiding joy of life right in the midst in the life's pain. Jesus was able to show love and compassion for those different from himself and even those who exhibited contempt and hatred for him and other around him. And these are the tools, love and joy as we take with us as we walk the paths on the journey of faith as we engage in ministry of peace and reconciliation for Baltimore or right here in little old Newport; ministry of compassion for places far away like in Nepal or in places just across the border in Oldtown, Idaho But in the process thick and thin we have to stay connected through the life of Jesus, with God and with our brothers and sisters in faith. This is where we gain our strength, the strength we need for the sometimes difficult journey that lies ahead. So I leave you again with these words Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing". Again we say AMEN.