

Dear Fellow Branches in the Vine of Christ,

40 years ago in the Phoenix valley there were acres and acres of citrus trees: oranges, tangerines, grapefruit. Today those trees are mostly gone. They have been replaced with houses and apartments. The owners of those orchards found it more profitable to sell out to developers.

Yes, there are still citrus trees in the valley. Many homes have orange and grapefruit trees. The owners have to learn how to take care of the trees. Fertilize twice a year, plenty of water, yearly pruning. When that is done faithfully, the owner receives plenty of fresh fruit and probably has some to share with the neighbors.

In our text Jesus talks about vine and branches. In so doing he's comparing us his children with trees that produce fruit. So

RESURRECTION CHRISTIANS PRODUCE FRUIT

I. Jesus says, **"I am the vine, you are the branches."** We are connected to Jesus as a branch to a tree.

What is it that connects us to Jesus? It is faith - trusting in all that Jesus has done for us. He taught us how to live our lives for God. He lived a perfect life, obeying every command of the Father, to give us his righteousness. He died a sacrificial death and thereby assured us that all our sins are sufficiently punished. In his glorious resurrection he guarantees that every sin is forgiven.

The Holy Spirit has taken that good news and has called us to faith and now keeps us in this faith. We trust in Jesus and by that faith connection we become productive people for God.

What is true of a fruit tree is true for us. Jesus explains, **"The Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit."** Jesus is referring to someone who no longer believes in him. That person is no longer productive for the Savior.

On the other hand Jesus says, **"Every branch that does bear fruit, the Father prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."** Pruning cleans out shoots that won't produce fruit. Those shoots are cut off the branch so there will be more room for the fruit.

So how does this pruning take place in a believer? Jesus says, **"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."** Through his Word, Jesus calls us by the gospel to be his branches, his believers. He has gathered us together as a congregation around Word and Sacrament. Together we can work to produce fruits of faith, and to carry out the mission of the Lord in this world.

As we work for our Lord, he enlightens us through the Word. He fills us with knowledge so that we can understand what pleases him and what does not. He enlightens us through the Word so that our faith will grow in knowledge and wisdom. We joyfully thank him for giving us this spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

Always the Lord is sanctifying us. Yes, the Father sees us as holy and righteous because of the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. But we know that we aren't perfect. The Holy Spirit works in us through Word and the Sacrament so that we will learn to behave in a way that honors and glorifies our Savior.

The key point in all of this is that we stay connected to Jesus by faith. Remember this: To keep that faith connection strong, we need to feed our faith on a daily basis. Just as you water and fertilize a fruit tree to make it more productive, so we Christians need to be watered and fertilized regularly. Why? Our faith can dry up when we fall into sins that lead us away from God. We need Jesus, the water of life. We need his forgiveness. We

need the fertilizer of his Word so that our relationship with Jesus is strengthened. Then we remain branches connected to Christ.

II. As connected branches that are growing in faith as God's Word and the Holy Spirit work in us, we will produce fruits of faith, good works to the glory of God.

Jesus says, **"Remain in me and I will remain in you."** What a beautiful promise from our Savior. As people connected to Jesus by faith, we have another promise from Jesus. **"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."** We will do good things for Christ.

Right now, in this church service, we are producing the fruits of our faith. We are praising God for all the blessings that he has showered upon us. We are offering him our service so that all the things that need to be done in a Christian congregation get done. We gladly care for God's house. We carefully prepare plans for our worship. We train the young people in God's Word. We plan how to welcome visitors and we invite them to return. We bring our offerings to the altar. These are fruits of faith.

In addition, our fruits of faith are the prayers that we offer to God. We trust that our Lord will answer those prayers according to his will. In fact, Jesus makes a promise here about our prayer life. **"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."** Notice that we ask according to God's Word, asking for what is good and right for us.

You know we don't stay in the church 24/7. We go out into the world as resurrection Christians. We look for opportunities to serve our fellow human beings. We help neighbors. We work diligently at our jobs. When we see an opening to share our faith, we do that. All of this, and so much more, we do because we are connected to our Savior. As believers we love to produce the fruits of faith, and do good things that benefit other people.

We also understand that failure to remain connected to Jesus results in disaster. Jesus makes that clear. The person who no longer believes in Jesus is like a dead branch on a tree. That branch is lopped off and thrown into the fire. Jesus says, **"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."** This is a warning to all of us. If we ignore our connection to Jesus, refuse to grow in faith in Christ, we are in danger of losing our faith. What a terrible sin that would be. Then our future is not the glory of heaven, but the fires of hell. So what do we do? We keep our connection to Christ through faith, and strengthen that connection through the Word and the Sacrament.

Sadly there are people who have abandoned the Savior. What do we do in those cases? We don't gather around the fire and cheer because such people are being thrown into hell. We pray for those who have cut themselves off from Christ. If we meet such a person on the street, we tell them, "We miss you at church." We invite them to return for worship.

Doing that is a fruit of faith, a good work. And when we are producing good works for Jesus, he says, **"This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."** By your good works, show people that you are connected to Christ Jesus. Let them see how much you love your Lord. Let them see how thankful you are that Jesus Christ has rescued you from death, and given you eternal life.

My friends, remain a living branch in Jesus, and produce the fruits of faith to his glory. Amen.