

John 15:1-8

May 14, 2006 – 5<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER, Mother's Day

Pastor Mark A. Cordes

## Live in God's Abundant Garden

‡ Painful pruning (vv.1-4)

‡ Fruitful branches (vv.5-8)

In the name of Jesus, the true Vine, dear fellow branches:

Remember what the mother of Forrest Gump liked to say? "Life is a box of chocolates." If that's right, then all you need do is open the lid and take your pick. You can be whatever you want to be. For some that may be the full extent of their training from Mom. And it may explain some of the frustration in our society. Life lived for self is no life at all. It's a downward spiral into self-doubt, dissatisfied by therapy and drugs. God created us to live for Him, not for ourselves. And He shows the blessings of such a self-sacrificing life in our Savior Jesus and every God-fearing mother following in His footsteps. Many of us have been blessed by such faithful daughters of the Most High God. They taught us to live for Him and for others. We don't have to be like the woman who opened her Mother's Day box of chocolates and cried. How would that work with her new diet? Here's a better way: **Live in God's Abundant Garden.** God does not promise us a rose garden. Before He can have **Fruitful branches**, He has to do some...

‡ Painful pruning (vv.1-4)

If fruit trees and vines could talk, they'd be crying, especially the pear tree in Coach Thompson's yard at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, a quarter century ago. He turned me loose with a pair of pruning shears and very clear instructions: "When you think you've cut enough, cut some more. Then go over it again." I did...then again...then called Coach to see if it was okay. "That's not enough," he said, pointing to the tree that looked to me so naked and bare with suckers lying all around on the ground. Some of the branches still to be cut off had born some fruit, just not enough. If trees could cry, that one would have complained bitterly about the **Painful pruning**.

"Go away and leave me alone!" is the cry of our heart when God goes to work on us. It's anguish for every Christian to lose children, husbands, friends along the way. Every Christian feels the painful tears: "Why, Lord? How long must this go on? Why did you have to take away such joy in my life and leave me in such heartache and sorrow?" God took Ezekiel's wife and told the prophet not to mourn because Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. No one but God knows the good of **Painful pruning**.

***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*** Sometimes good people are not good for us. And some branches bear no fruit at all. Our wise and loving heavenly Father did **Painful pruning** first with Jesus who said, ***"My Father...the gardener...cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit."*** Besides Judas, how many other fruitless Christians has the Father needed to cut off from Jesus for not listening to His Word? Some are in danger from our own fellowship. In spite of years of phone calling, letter writing and personal visits they still bear no fruit in worship and neglect the healthy nourishment of Word and sacrament. We need God's Word to build our faith, for ***"without faith it is impossible to please God."*** (Hebrews 11:6)

But this **Painful pruning** also continues for ***"every branch that does bear fruit."*** These too the Father ***"prunes so that they will be even more fruitful."*** What distractions in my life draw me away from God's Word and sacrament like suckers using up sap for leaves, but no good fruit? Fact is, only God knows. I'm just a branch with no eyes for such spiritual matters. But I can feel the pain. And sometimes it leaves me wondering whether God loves me, or has He given up on me when prayers seem to go unanswered, when we seek relief from a long felt grief, when temptations come alluring? In our foolish

pride and self-absorption, wanting our life the way we want it, our greatest accomplishments are often little more than leafy branches. But what good is an apple tree without apples? Where is the wine from vineyards with no grapes? If not for the Father's loving wisdom, we would find no way to make fruit grow on ourselves. We would not even see the need. We would be good for nothing but a bonfire. But God loves to create what we cannot see or imagine. As Jesus told His disciples, ***"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."***

One pastor wanted to demonstrate this, so he cut a branch off his grape arbor just an hour before church. But before he could show the congregation, it had withered from lack of moisture. Grapevines need roots way down deep. Warm sunny days with little rain and cool nights can produce fine wine as long as the branches stay nourished on the vine. Mothers, fathers, children and adults – we all need Jesus to nourish our souls in order for us to **Live in God's Abundant Garden**. God alone can make...

### ✠ Fruitful branches (vv.5-8)

You can see the need for faithful mothers in this picture if you pay attention to the kings of ancient Israel. In Judah at least, they each descended from their royal father. But what strikes me is the way the Holy Spirit made a point of mentioning the mothers by name. Kings need faithful instruction. If a king ruled selflessly for the good of the people, his mother had taught him the fear of the LORD. If she failed in this, he did not survive beyond the burning pile of Baal worship and idolatry. Each king without faithful instruction from his mother had no faith in the Messiah to come. Unbelief showed in ***"acts of the sinful nature...: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."*** God warns that ***"those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*** (Galatians 5:19-21 NIV) Lack of good works showed lack of faith for kings too. Unbelief condemned them to hell.

This is frightening for conscientious parents. We have a responsibility to bring our children to Jesus from infancy on, to set a good example for them in faith and life. If we fail, God holds us responsible. I pity the parents who teach their children to dance, but fail to teach them God's Word in faithful worship. The best place for faithful parents is on our knees between worship and family devotions. Our dear heavenly Father promises: ***"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."*** (Proverbs 22:6 NIV) We want **Fruitful branches**, and so does God.

And that, dear believers, is also our comfort. God is the perfect Father with the warmest mother-love. Yet Jesus wept over God's people: ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"*** (Luke 13:34 NIV) God did everything right to bring up His children, but they refused. How dearly we all need to live in Christ the Vine.

Jesus says, ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*** Godly children God wants too.

We are reflections of God in our desire as Christians to bear fruit for God. Like our heavenly Father we want our children to grow up as good citizens of our dear country here, and fruitful citizens of our heavenly home. It will take more than a box of chocolates for them to win souls for Christ. Jesus is talking about the fruit of the Holy Spirit which He describes like the helpful labels under a candy lid through His holy apostle Paul: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*** (Galatians 5:22f NIV) What better gifts can we give our children? Remain in Christ, and He promises, ***"You will bear much fruit."*** Living for God and our neighbor gives us all great joy as we **Live in God's Abundant Garden**. Amen