



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 5

April 28, 2024

Abiding in Christ

John 15:1–8

¹[Jesus said:] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

In John 15, the beloved apostle recorded for us the last sermon Jesus preached to His disciples before He was arrested and crucified, which He preached in the upper room on the night He instituted His Holy Supper. The congregation was the twelve, those closest to Him, who would later cultivate the church by continuing the work Jesus had begun, by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Today’s Gospel, then, addresses you, the church. These are not words for the world; they’re for those already in the church, having been baptized and having made a public confession of the Faith, who face quite a different struggle compared to that of unbelievers. Baptized Christians, who’ve professed their faith to the world, now struggle with being faithful to that profession and being obedient to Christ and His teachings.

Unbelievers either do not know the way of salvation or they reject it. They have a whole different set of problems to contend with. But the Christian struggles with faithfulness, with what it is, and how he must constantly strive to balance his life in the world.

In describing this struggle, Jesus speaks of bearing fruit, and in so doing, He utilizes the idea of a vineyard, saying that He is the true vine. In other words, Jesus is the life-source of the church. As He says in our text, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

This is the first struggle for the Christian in the world. Once we enter into Christ and His church, we soon feel that we are now free to stray from home. We become complacent. We begin to think that Jesus is here if we need Him, so we can go our own way *until* we need Him. It’s like those who get confirmed, and then seldom, if ever, come



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 5

April 28, 2024

back to church. They have Jesus in their back pocket and can pull Him out whenever they feel the need, oblivious to the reality that, like a lot of things, by the time we feel the need, it's already too late.

People like this revert to what can be called the "church on wheels." Jesus is here for the bridal carriage, the baby buggy, and the hearse. Maybe we'll turn to Him if we're in trouble, but in "normal" day-to-day living, He's just not in our stream of consciousness.

Jesus speaks against such notions. He is the vine, the life-source, the only source of empowerment there is; apart from Him we can do nothing. Only those who are grafted into Him through Holy Baptism, will grow fruit. What sort of fruit is borne by a branch that has been cut off? Nothing. It withers and dies. And so will we – so will our faith – wither and die if its connection to the vine is severed. We must abide with Him and He with us.

Now, there's another point that Jesus makes here, specifically for the Christian. According to Jesus, the Christian will face struggles, temptations, tribulations, and will be forced to endure these things patiently. This is pruning.

In a vineyard, if a branch has been bearing good fruit, from time to time the vinedresser will prune it back to encourage new growth, so that it may produce even more fruit. If a Christian is abiding in Christ and bearing good fruit, the Father, the vinedresser, will from time to time prune the branch back so that it will bear even more fruit.

This is why we at times face hardship. The Father is pruning us. This, of course, is contrary to the way the world thinks. The world believes that if you're a godly person, then you won't have any problems at all. It falsely believes that if your faith is sound, everything will be good. Which is wrong.

Pruning bears more good fruit because, when we struggle and face hardships, we're driven to call out to Christ. In other words, the Christian runs to Jesus. Pruning is also a stripping of the false ideas we often get about the Faith, so that we may come to a proper knowledge of Christ's teaching and practice.

Such false ideas for the Christian usually involve the notion of abiding in Christ. What does it mean to abide in Christ? Well, it's not the "church on wheels" concept of having Jesus around when you want Him, nor is it the "foxhole" concept of having Him there when there's a crisis going on. When Jesus says, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing," He's not supporting a minimalist mindset toward Him. To *abide* in Jesus and to have Jesus abiding in you is life-changing. It means having your entire life subsumed under Him when you've been baptized and confess the Faith. St. Paul speaks about this to the Colossian church: "Set your minds on things that are above," he says, "not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is [now] hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:2-3).

Truly abiding in Christ is a baptismal statement of your life, but it entails the reality that you will actually live out your baptism by breathing, eating, and living the words of Christ.



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 5

April 28, 2024

The Christian Faith and life is not for those who are indifferent. Abiding in Christ entails a striving for those things which are holy and unseen. Abiding in Christ is a life of prayer, not just casually or every once in while. The life of prayer becomes part of who you are. You begin to live a life on your knees, praying the liturgy, praying the Daily Office, going to the Divine Service regularly.

It is significant that Jesus preaches this in connection with His institution of the Lord's Supper. Abiding in Jesus, the Vine, and bearing good fruit, means that your life comes from Him, and His Holy Supper is meant to fill you up with His life and holiness. This means that our home is here at this altar. Once a person has been baptized, he has a new home, a place where he spends his time. Everything in our lives flows out of this holy altar.

Beloved, you are meant to envision yourself kneeling here, with Jesus on your lips in prayer and in the Sacrament, where you are blessed, forgiven, strengthened, and made holy to the Lord.

To live apart from this is frightening. Jesus says that any branch that does not abide in Him is thrown away and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. These are words of condemnation, beloved. Be careful that you're not one of those branches that fails to bring forth the good fruits of faith.

Of course, abiding in Christ also means repenting of sin. Repent of your sins and your failure to bear good fruit. Seek Christ's mercy. Jesus loves you, after all. He died on the cross, bearing the sins of the world, including yours. Tell Him that you don't want to live apart from Him. Ask Him to give you the desire to live the life of prayer, the life of faith, the life of devotion to Him. He is the Giver of every good gift. And He will not deny anyone who prays in this way. And remember that He does forgive you.

Beloved, He abides in you through Holy Baptism, and He remains with you. Rejoice in His goodness and come regularly to this altar. This is your home. Let us rejoice and pray together and seek His good will for the life of the Church, that He may continue to sustain it through His Holy Word and precious sacraments. Truly, we are blessed to be in this holy church and to have been given the gift of life and eternal salvation, which is a promise with His guarantee. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen