

MESSAGE FOR MOTHER'S DAY, MAY 10, 2009

Lessons: Acts 8: 26-40, 1 John 4: 1-11, John 15: 1-8 I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRACHES.

Introduction

I am a very visual person. I'm a visual learner. When I see something illustrated, that image imprints on my memory. That's one reason when I teach Bible Class or Catechism Class, I use the whiteboard with all my illustrations. As the old cliché says, 'a picture', for me, 'is worth a 1,000 words'. God's Word is like that. It is very visual. It's filled with picture images to illustrate the relationship between Jesus and all those baptized into Him, such as the picture of Jesus the Bridegroom and we the Church His Bride, Jesus as the Head and we the Church His Body. Last Sunday, Confirmation Sunday, we were shown the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and we the Church the sheep of His pasture. In today's Gospel lesson, John 15, the picture worth a 1,000 words, is of Jesus the True Vine and all who are united, connected to Him as the branches which produce rich, juicy fruit.

This is what I would like to talk to you about a little bit on this Mother's Day... NO, this Christian Women's Day.

I. OUR LIFE IN THE TRUE VINE!

What happens to a marriage where the husband and wife are no longer united? Well, physically the fruit of children cannot be produced. And emotionally the fruit of sexual intimacy and love and respect become divorced and the marriage dies. What happens when a body is separated from its head? Well, I have beheaded many a duck, geese, turkey and chickens in my day and when the head is butchered off the body it jumps all over the place and then dies. What happens to sheep without a shepherd? Well, they wander all over becoming victims of wolves and bears and not being the smartest animals in God's creation they get themselves into all kinds of deadly predicaments. And what happens to branches and their fruit when they don't remain connected to the vine? Well, they wither, they shrivel, they die.

The Vine gives life to the branches, whether we're speaking of a literal physical vine and branches as illustrated on your bulletin cover or a spiritual grace and faith vine and branches such as Jesus is picturing in our Gospel lesson. Either relationship, physical and/or spiritual, is by the design and the work of our Triune God. The problem is that sinful human beings which we all are by nature and nurture are always trying to redefine and redo God's work and design. God's design in marriage is to be one man and one woman for a life time, but sinful man wants to redefine marriage as one man and one man or one woman and one woman. God's design is we are fearfully and wonderfully made as the crown of His creation but sinful man wants to redefine us as being evolved animals through the survival of the fittest, so you better fight for your survival. God's design is life begins at conception and God knew our names before the creation of the cosmos, but sinful man wants to redefine our existence by the selective choice

of abortion and euthanasia. God's design for families is children to honor their fathers and mothers, but sinful man wants to redefine that relationship as being best of friends. God's design is that Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life, our only Savior, but sinful man wants to redefine salvation as tolerance of all religion's roads, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, animism as all leading to heaven. God's design has been revealed to us by His grace for our good. And yet our human nature and nurture wants to live as if we are a bride without a groom divorced from God, as if we are a body without a head jumping away from God, as if we are sheep without a shepherd wandering from God, as if we are branches detached from the vine withered to God. But, our redefinition of God's design always brings death like the divorce of a marriage, like a beheaded body, like sheep without a shepherd, like a branch without the vine.

II.

Separated from the Vine, the branches can do nothing. They're dead. We have no true life separated from our connection to Jesus Christ and His Word. We can claim to be a Christian but our relationship with Christ is only real through hearing God's Word and receiving God's Sacraments His visible Word. What people claim to be and what they are, are not synonymous. I can *claim* to be the President of the United States but that doesn't mean I *am* the President of the United States. To be President is by objective, observable election, not simply by my subjective feelings and statement of being the President of the United States. We can tout our name listed on a denominational membership list, and we can display our institutional baptism and confirmation certificates, but separated from the life-giving nourishment of God's means of grace, His objective Word and Sacraments = the confident invocation of Holy Baptism, the announcement of Holy Absolution, hearing the preaching and teaching of the Holy Bible, frequent reception of Holy Communion, we cannot truly be alive and bear the fruit God desires. Even though we claim to be God's Holy Christian Church, we're withered branches to be thrown into the fires of hell, burning eternally, eternally dead. What we claim to be and what we objectively show to be are two different things. I can point to the maple tree outside of church and say it's an apple tree, but the truth of what it is, is in what God says it is. A maple tree is not an apple tree, which can be seen by its observable fruit. United with the True Vine through God's objective, observable means of grace, we branches are alive and living, Resurrection/ Easter people, truly God's Holy Christian Church, a communion of saints. The sap of God's grace flows from the root, the trunk, the vine and nourishes us the branches. Picture Jesus' cross as that root, that trunk, that vine planted at the open tomb and through faith given by the sap of God's Word and Sacraments, we are connected, we are attached, we are grafted to all that Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, as our Substitute and Savior upon that cross and through that empty tomb. Jesus has pruned us. He has cut away and removed from us our sinful nature from

God's sight. Our sinful nature, which is tempted by the evil of this world, by Satan and his demons, by ourselves, me, myself and I, to redefine and redesign God's definition and design of marriage, families, abortion, creation, even salvation alone in Jesus Christ, and membership in His Church. And when pruned, though it appears to hurt the plant, cutting it back, or pruning, actually increases its growth, and it bears more and more and more and more good fruit.

III.

In Galations 5, God gives us His definition of what the good fruit His branches, His Church, pruned and grafted into the True Vine, will produce= **'love'** as our epistle **1 John 4** says **'anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love' ... 'joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control'**. Fundamentally, these characteristics are actually defining Jesus Christ Himself as our Savior, **'in this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins'**. Jesus is perfectly loving, Jesus rejoices over us, Jesus is God's peace, God's patience, God's kindness, God's goodness, God's faithfulness, God's gentleness, God's self control, personified, incarnate towards us sinful human beings. For Jesus' sake all those good fruits are grafted onto us in God's sight, you see. We are, in fact, whether we always notice it in ourselves or in others all the time, we have become in fact in God's sight and for others, loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self controlled. Hard to believe, isn't it? But, it's true because God declares it to be so! Grafted, united, conected to Jesus through faith by means of God's grace in Word and Sacraments we are producing these fruits of the Spirit of the Father and Jesus. We bear the fruits of the Triune God so that others can pick us clean. But, united to the True Vine we have an abundant and never ending source of life for others to pick and to receive from us. Christ the True Vine nourishes our wives and husbands, our marriages with the fruits of love and faithfulness and forgiveness, fruits we bear. Christ the True Vine strengthens our families and children with the fruits of peace and patience, fruits we bear. Christ the True Vine benefits our society and culture and community with the self control and goodness of being Pro life, Pro intelligent design, Pro, God defined marriage, fruits we bear. And ultimately, Christ the True Vine uses these fruits of our faith to lead us and enable us to share the Word of the Cross and the Open Tomb of Jesus with others. Like Philip and the Ethiopian **'opening our mouth, beginning with the Scriptures we tell the good news about Jesus'**. We bear the fruit of our Christian witness wherever God has planted us, as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as neighbors and friends, as citizens of the Plainview/Elgin community and the whole world, as God's Holy Christian Church, Immanuel Lutheran Church and School.

Conclusion

Today is Mother's Day, every Christian mother and every Christian woman is an example and an application of what I am trying to preach today. Most any woman can bear a child and become a mother, but not every woman is an example of a Christian mother, a Christian woman, even though she may claim to be. It's like me *saying* that I am the President of the United States, or that I am a member of the Christian Church, but what I *say* is not necessarily what I truly am. Any woman can claim to be a mother, but not necessarily a Christian mother or a Christian woman. I know the women in my life have been and are what God's grace has made them to be, truly observable Christian women, my Mom, my Grandma Annie, my Aunt Lorraine, my wife Sharon, my mother-in-law Marge, my sister Becky, all my sisters-in-law, female friends, my daughter Jenny, and now my daughter Rachel, for my grandson Tyler. All these women, mothers or not, are grafted into Jesus Christ as their Savior the True Vine through the means of God's Grace, His Word and Sacraments. And in my life, they have ,as many of you women of Immanuel, as my mothers and sisters and friends in Christ, have bore much fruit in my life for which I am very thankful to God. And I know you Moms and Grandmas, you sisters and sisters-in-law, you daughters and aunts, you wives and mothers-in-law, you as each other's girl friends, all connected and nourished by Jesus the True Vine are bearing much observable fruit to your families and friends and neighbors and community also, 'you go girls of Immanuel Lutheran'. A picture is worth a 1,000 words: Jesus, as the Bridegroom, and we, His Bride; Jesus, as the Head, and we, His Body; Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, and we, the sheep of His pasture. And each of you Christian women, mother's or not, are picturing, are illustrating, are sharing the fruits of God's grace in your lives, being grafted, being connected to Jesus, the True Vine, your Savior as what He declares you to be His Holy Christian Church, His bride, His body, His sheep, His branches. Happy Mother's Day! NO, Happy Christian Women's Day, every day, OUR LIFE IN THE TRUE VINE, you go girls! Amen