

## LIFE IN HIS NAME

### THE TRUE VINE

John 15:1-17

At this point Jesus is now saying, "Alright, guys, we're leaving the room and we're going to the garden." If you know anything about Israel or Jerusalem, one of the things you will see in the land is that it's covered with vineyards. The vineyard is a symbol of Israel. In fact, if you study the coins from ancient times, even to present day, the vineyard is kind of the national symbol of Israel, like our eagle is for us. So, they see the vineyards, they have just partaken of the fruit of the vine, and now Jesus, with his parabolic teaching, takes the vineyard and applies it to himself.

We are going to look at this - The True Vine. We are going to just read the first six verses, pray, and then learn a little bit more about how this applies to our lives. Follow along in verse 1. It says:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide 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. I 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. If 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.

Let's pray. Father, we pray that you would open your word to us now. Lord Jesus, we pray that this ancient teaching you brought to your 11 disciples in this moment would be open to us even now. And Lord, we ask that more than an image, we would see the source of life, the source of fruit, the source of all that we need to bear fruit in this life and the next, Lord, and that we would apply this to our lives even today -- to find our life in you, to hide our life in you, to abide in you, Jesus. Meet us by your grace. Draw us to yourself, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

"I am the true vine." Right there is a loaded phrase. This is how Jesus opens this discourse with us this morning. He says, "I am the true vine." And I love how the Lord shows up in church, because I didn't tell Adam or Adam to talk about the "I am," but Adam already gave you all the background of

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“I am” a little bit earlier. Do you remember -- he talked about Moses and the burning bush? “Who sent me?” “I am has sent you.”

In John’s gospel John is very careful to capture the I am statements that Jesus used in his earthly ministry. There were actually eight. He says, “I am the way, I am the door, I am the gatekeeper, I am the good shepherd.” He takes a lot of the imagery of the Old Testament, really, and he says, “Okay, the Israelite leaders or the priests – they were bad shepherds.” But then Jesus comes and says, “I am the good shepherd.”

Well, this is the eighth and final “I am” statement of Jesus in John’s gospel, and he grabs the imagery of the vine and says, “I am the true vine.” Well, what is he getting at here? I want to read a scripture. Actually, flip to Isaiah Chapter 5. Hold your spot and flip to Isaiah Chapter 5. While you are flipping to Isaiah Chapter 5, we are going to put up on the screen a verse out of the Psalms – Psalm 80:8-9. Isaiah is in the middle of your bible, if you’re having a hard time finding it. Listen to this. Psalm 80:8-9 says: “You” (talking about God) “brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.”

The whole Exodus narrative is basically God transplanting a vine from Egypt and placing it into the Promised Land, where it was to bear fruit and grow. If you read your bible over and over and over again, one of the things you’ll discover about vineyard and vine language is that it’s a sign of God’s blessing when it bears fruit – to drink of the fruit of the vine, to enjoy it, to enjoy the fruit of your labor. And Israel was called to be a fruitful vine for God. Israel is called over and over this vine. We talked about that a little earlier, right? The vine was kind of their image. It was the symbol of who they were. And yet, they weren’t always a faithful vine, and they didn’t always bear good fruit, so Isaiah the prophet, in Isaiah Chapter 5...let’s read just a little bit.

Let me sing for my beloved  
my love song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.  
He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;  
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;

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and he looked for it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes.

If you look at the Hebrew for that term, and I don't read Hebrew -- I'm just going to my commentaries here, but "wild grapes" is a hard term to translate. It was like these putrid, disgusting, foul fruit. The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures translated it "thorns." So, he is looking for fruit, but instead there are thorns and putrid fruit, basically.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and men of Judah,  
judge between me and my vineyard.  
What more was there to do for my vineyard,  
that I have not done in it?  
When I looked for it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes?  
And now I will tell you  
what I will do to my vineyard.  
I will remove its hedge,  
and it shall be devoured;  
I will break down its wall,  
and it shall be trampled down.  
I will make it a waste;  
it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
and briers and thorns shall grow up;  
I will also command the clouds  
that they rain no rain upon it.  
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
and he looked for justice,  
but behold, bloodshed;

for righteousness,  
but behold, an outcry!

The vineyard of the Lord is Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus repurposes this vineyard language over and over again. In the parable of the vineyards he talks about the vineyard being the kingdom of God. Do you remember that? When the tenants didn't take care of it, he sent his son, they beat him up, and finally killed him. Well, here in John he says "Now the vineyard isn't simply God's kingdom, it's me." Jesus is the vineyard. Jesus is the true vineyard. Jesus is the true Israel. And where they failed, where God's people failed, Jesus came to bring about a resurrection and a restoration and to fold people into that vineyard from all across the lands, not simply that one piece of land out in the Middle East, but all across the world, that God's vineyard would spread and bear fruit for his glory. Because Jesus is the great I am, the source of all life, and he is the true vineyard.

"I am the true vine. Abide in me." That was just the first phrase. I promise the rest of the passage will go a little faster. But that's the backdrop. That's to understand, really, what Jesus is getting at here. He is saying, "Look to me! I am the source of all the blessings promised in the old covenant. They find their fulfillment in me. I am the true vine."

And he says to abide in him. We don't tend to talk that way much anymore: "Abide in me." But, it's the idea of living in me, finding your life hidden in Jesus. Theologians like to talk about it this way - it's called "union with Christ." So whenever you read in your bible that it talks about being in Christ, especially Paul, in the letters, in the epistles at the end, he says, "In him, in Christ, in him..." You see, we are found in Jesus. Because we are in him, every spiritual blessing comes to us. Jesus grabs that and says, "Abide in me. Find your life in me. Abide in Christ and these things will happen in your life." And he gives us five things. He says, "If you abide in me, five things will happen."

So, what does abiding in Jesus Christ do? First:

- I. Abiding in the true vine, Jesus Christ, unites us to his cleansing word.

Look at verses 3 and 7. After he says, "Abide in me," he says, "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." Jump down to verse 7. "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Do you see that? "That my word has cleansed you," verse 3? "Abide in me and my words abide in you." He says, "When you come to

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me, when you find your life in me, my word will find its home in you. My words will come into you and they will cleanse you.”

In his high priestly prayer, just a few pages over in John 17:17, he says this. He is praying to the Father and says, “Sanctify them, God. Sanctify us. Sanctify my people in truth. Set them apart. Make them holy, God.” Then he follows it up with this. He says, “Your word is truth.” The word of Christ, the word of God sanctifies us. It sets us apart. It makes us holy and it cleanses us.

In Ephesians 5, Paul picks that up and he says that we are washed in the water with the word, that God’s word comes into your life and it gives you a bath. If we’re honest, there’s a lot of dirty junk in us, isn’t there? There’s a lot of filth inside of our souls. But God’s word, through Christ, when we come to Christ -- his word comes into us and it cleanses us. It cleanses you and sets you apart and sanctifies you and makes you holy. He says, “Abide in me and my words in you, and you will be cleansed.”

This is critical at the front end because if you’re not sure if you’re abiding in Christ, this whole passage is really about, “Do I know if I’m a disciple or not?” This proves that you are, that you’ve been chosen. He says one of the ways you can tell is if my word is in you and has cleansed you and is cleaning you. I don’t know if you’ve talked to a lot of people – your neighbors and friends and folks from other belief systems – but I’ve discovered this real fast: Everybody wants a piece of Jesus. Everybody thinks Jesus is on their team.

It doesn’t matter which religion or sect you belong to, they have a way to fit Jesus in and say, “He’s part of our team too.” He’s either a prophet, or he’s an avatar, or he’s one of the manifestations of God. Or maybe the New Age movement says, “The Christ in you” – he’s kind of an enlightened person and you can become your own Christ too. Everybody wants Christ! They all want the fruit that Christ offers, but then you bump up against his words, and that’s how you really know if you have the real Jesus or not. That’s where you learn whether you’re in the true vine or not. It’s by discovering if you have his words, not just the idea. Jesus is not just a cup that you can fill with any definition of your ideals -- “That’s my Jesus.”

He has something to say and a claim he wants to make on our lives. Some of the things he said are really popular. Some of the things he said are really offensive. I mean, it would cause you to blush if you were saying it on TV and said, “I believe that.” But we have that word and we believe that word

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and that word cleanses us. It shows us that we're in Christ when we have his word - not just a name of Jesus.

Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe his words? Are his words in you? His cleansing word shows that you abide in Christ. When we are united to Christ, his word comes into you, his word gives you spiritual life, his word is alive and active, conforming you into the image of Jesus.

That's the first thing abiding in Jesus does. Abiding in the true vine unites us to his cleansing word.

II. Secondly, abiding in the true vine, Jesus Christ, unites us to his saving life.

Look at the beginning of verse 2. It says: "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." Verse 6: "If 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." Abiding in Christ connects us to his saving life. It unites us to his saving life.

Now, I don't need to state the obvious. There is both great encouragement in those statements and fearful trembling in those statements, right? Because he is saying, "Listen, I am the source of life. I'm the root, you're the branches. I am the very stem of the vine and you are the tendrils, if you will."

I have a vine in my yard, and when I cut off a branch, it might look green for a little bit, but it's not going to be green much longer. Husbands, when you go and buy flowers for your wives, they look great for maybe a week. But those things are dead. And Jesus is saying, "You have to stay connected, or you're dead. You have to stay in me, or you're going to be gathered and thrown out and burned." That's a scary thing.

You say, "Is this really born-again people that he's holding this out to? Or are these unbelievers and he's just saying 'If you don't join me...?'" Well, he does say "every vine of mine," so it appears that these are people who associate publicly with Jesus, do the right outward symbols, but have no life of Christ in them. I said earlier that Jesus is sharing this with his 11 disciples. Now, when I say the number 11, some things should start going off in your head. "I thought there were supposed to be 12. Oh, one of them is not there anymore."

Flip back to Chapter 13. This is where Jesus is washing their feet and Peter objects. In verses 1 through 9 he says: "Lord, you should not be doing this. This job is below you." He says, "If I don't wash your feet, you have no part of me." Then he says, "Wash all of me." Then he says, "You don't need to be washed because everyone who has taken a bath doesn't need that. Just your feet..." All

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that goes down, and listen in verse 10. Look, he says: “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you” (the “you” there is plural) “are clean,” (all of you in this room are clean) “but not every one of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Verse 21 -- jump ahead. “After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, “Truly, I will say to you, one of you will betray me.” They’re not sure who it is. “Who is it? Is it me, Lord?” Jesus says in verse 26: “It’s the one whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. And Jesus said to him, “Whatever you are going to do, do it quickly.” And he’s gone. He’s gone, and he has disconnected himself from the vine.

Now, I want to be clear. He was never clean. It wasn’t like Judas was saved, he was cleansed, then he fell away. I don’t believe that. But I’ll tell you what: Nobody in the room thought Judas. Nobody. “Is it me? Who could it be?” Judas probably didn’t even think it was Judas at first. Then it all comes together and you realize that he’s planning it. We don’t even fully know his motives, but we know this – that he was not clean, and Satan took control of this man. That night he was selling out his savior for 30 pieces of silver, betraying him with a kiss. He is so remorseful that he hangs himself, then falls headlong and bursts open, dead.

Just a few days ago he was with Jesus, and Jesus says that could be any one of the vines who think that they are in him. We could be that deceived. We could spend three years with Jesus. If he could be that deceived, we could be that deceived. This passage has great hope and a great warning for us: Abide in Jesus Christ or be gathered and burned.

That gathering vocabulary is used throughout the parables, like the parable of the net and the fish. They gather and sort through. And the parable of the weeds and the wheat -- we can’t tell the difference, but at the end the angels will gather them and sort it all out. Matthew 25 tells about the end of judgment – sheep and goats, remember? They are sorted out. There is a great gathering, and whether it happens in this life with Judas, or the next life in the final judgment, we will be exposed. For some, that will be the first day that we realize that we were a fraud all along. Because Jesus says, “not all of you who say, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter.” He’ll say to some, “I never knew you. That person didn’t abide in me.”

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Jesus is the source of life and we must, church, we must abide in him. We can't go through the motions. Don't trust in your baptism, though every one of us should be baptized. Don't trust in communion and the outward performances and going through the motions. Find your life in Jesus. Jesus will save you. The rituals will not. The rituals are only a sign that points to the true source, which is Christ. Abide in him and you will have life now and forever. That's what he says. "Abide in me and you will be connected to my saving life."

III. Thirdly, abiding in Jesus Christ, the true vine, unites us to his abundant fruit.

If we're in Christ, his word is in us. We have his life flowing through us, and thirdly, that produces fruit - fruit in abundance. I read a lot of those passages already - the first couple of verses, but I want to pick up a few more, because basically one through five are all about fruit-bearing. Then, look again at verses 8 and 16. He says, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Do you see that again? The fruit proves that we belong to Jesus.

Verse 16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." When we abide in Jesus Christ, he promises us great fruit. In fact, he says, "The evidence, the proof that you belong to me, that you're my disciples, is that there will be some fruit in your life."

You would think that's true. If you are connected to, say, an apple tree, you would think there might be some apples on that tree, right? And you wouldn't want to be picking thorns and thistles from an apple tree, or you might wonder what kind of tree you have growing in your yard. That's what he says. "If you're in me, there will be fruit."

I want to be careful because we can start to become hyper-introspective. Do you know what I mean by that? "Oh man, I'm not sure I'm fruitful enough." That's not the point. The point isn't to say, "Man, he's much more fruitful than I am, so maybe he's a disciple and I'm not." That's not what Jesus is getting at here. He is saying, "If you're bearing the fruit of my discipleship, not only do I promise great fruit in your life, I promise you'll get more fruitful." He says the Father (remember this?) he's the vine. The Father is the vinedresser. And the moment there's a little bud of fruit in your life, you know what the Lord does? He prunes you so that you bear more fruit. Then when that bears fruit, you know what he's going to do again? Prune you, so that it bears more fruit, and

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then it bears more fruit. Then you know what he's going to do? He's going to prune you, because that's what a vinedresser does. They prune the vine.

Now, I don't pretend to be a vinedresser, but I do have a vine in my backyard. I planted it on this big wall, just because it was an ugly wall and I wanted something cool growing on it. So I put a vine there and I tried to let the vine grow up on it. It was a scraggly, stinky vine that didn't spread out on the trellis at all. It just kind of made a beeline to the top. I was like, "What is this? I wanted to have a really pretty vine here." Then it got to the top and started growing over it, so I cut the top off, and the weirdest thing happened. It started to ooze this white, almost like plant blood, if you will. But then I found out it split into two. I'm like: "That's interesting." So I kept chopping it off and I realized that when I chopped it off again, it spread into two more, and into two more. All of a sudden I had this really bushy vine on the top, and it was really scraggly on the bottom. "Alright, let me chop this whole thing down." So I chopped it back down to the bottom, and it started to spread out all over the place. And wherever I wanted to fill in what was gaping, I just would rip a little piece off or chop it off and it would bleed a little bit, but two would spring forth, and that thing filled in beautifully.

Now I have this beautiful flowering vine in my backyard. It's not because I knew what I was doing, but I discovered it. Here's what Jesus says: "The Father himself is the vinedresser. He knows exactly what he's doing in your life, and he will prune you exactly where you need it."

I did a little research. They look for the dead wood and they cut off the dead part so that it will go green again. And just like all of us are a little dirty and need cleansing, there's dead stuff in us that needs to be cut out. Jesus says the Father is good at finding it and cutting it out of your life, so that you'll bear more fruit.

I want to be clear. I think you could push these analogies or illustrations too far, so I want to be careful with that, but I would say this about pruning in our lives: It involves blades and some cutting. I would imagine sometimes the Father's pruning is painful. Sometimes the things that he wants to cut out of your life, you'd prefer stay right there. And yet, the Father loves you, and the Son loves you so much, the Spirit working in you as his Helper so much, that he's going to chop it off.

Maybe you're experiencing some of that in your life right now, where there's a blade cutting, and you're like, "Ouch! I don't know if I want to let go of this thing." The promise of the Son to you

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through the Father is this: If the Father is pruning it, it's to bear more fruit in your life -- abundant fruit, that your fruit should abide and remain. If you abide in Jesus Christ, there will be fruit.

Maybe you're a new believer. Give it some time. Don't say, "Okay, I got saved last week. Now I have to bear fruit or I'm not saved." That's not the point of this passage. But, church, examine your life. Does my life reveal fruitfulness? Do I have Christ's word in me? Am I bearing fruit for Jesus? If not, what does it mean to go deeper into Christ?

You know, Peter was told at one time that he had Satan in him. Do you remember that? Where Jesus is telling him his plan, and Peter says, "Never, Lord!" Jesus said, "I'm going to die for your sins and come back from the dead." He says, "You'll never die! That's never going to happen on my watch!" And Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan. You don't have the things of God in your mind."

Then right around the same time Jesus told Peter he was going to deny him three times. Do you remember that? Then he denies him three times. You don't need to flip there, but at the end of the gospel of John, in John Chapter 20, there is this account where Jesus is with Peter in his post-resurrection appearance. He says, "Peter, do you love me?" "Of course, Lord, I love you." "Feed my sheep." "Peter, do you really love me?" "Lord, you just asked me that. Yeah, I love you, Lord." "Tend to my sheep. Care for my lambs." "Peter, do you really love me?" Third time. It says Peter was grieved. It hurt him. His feelings had been hurt. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."

People wrestle with, "Why did Jesus keep going back and back?" It's a threefold restoration. You know, he denied him three times, restored him three times. But here's the point. I believe that was the pruning work of the Father in Peter's life - to cut out the enemy's thinking and ways of working. And it hurt. It grieved him. Sometimes pruning will hurt in your life, but it will always bear fruit. Peter not only went hard after Jesus the rest of his life, he died for Jesus. He sacrificed his own life so that others would hear about Jesus, because of the Father's fruit and pruning in Peter's life. If you abide in Jesus Christ, abiding in him brings abundant fruit.

IV. Fourthly, abiding in Jesus Christ, the true vine, unites us to his sacrificial love.

This is the longest point and then one short point. Look at verses 9 and 10. It says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

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Verse 12:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. Verse 17: These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

If you follow the whole teaching there, if you want to look at it and just put a little bracket in your bible, basically verses 1 through 8 are all about the vine, and verses 9 through 17 are all about love, aren't they? Why is that? One is an illustration of the other. He is basically saying that if you abide in me you'll bear much fruit, and the greatest example of that fruit is love in your life. The greatest fruit, the fruit of the Spirit (we looked at the work of the Holy Spirit last week and Brian hit this as well) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that the greatest Christian virtue is love. Love, love, love. And if you don't have love, you have nothing. Right? That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, and Jesus says if you don't abide in me you can do nothing. Love. Love is at the center of our faith. If you are worried about looking for lots of fruit in your life and you are saying, "Oh, the fruit of the Spirit! I've got to look for all these things!" Let me simplify it for you: Is there love? Is there love in your life?

It's easy to love our children -- sometimes. It's even easy to love our friends, maybe not to lay down our lives for our friends like Jesus did, but he says, "Love will mark your life if you're a follower of mine." The greatest example of fruit in a follower of Jesus, someone who abides in Jesus, is that the love of the Father comes into our life through the love of the Son, and spills out, where we start loving other people. Let me put it in the negative: No angry, mean, cranky Christians allowed, alright? We can have a bad day, but if that's who you are, you need some pruning, alright? If you're in Christ you need some pruning.

Love should mark your life. We should be loving people, and the greatest example of love the world has ever seen is written there right in verse 13. This is the gospel. This is the good news that connects us to the vine: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." "And you are my friends and I'm laying down my life for you. I've told you beforehand I'm going to do it, and I will do it." And he makes good on his promise. He does it.

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I said this was eighth and final time Jesus says the “I am,” but there’s actually one more. Do you know where it is? Flip with me one more page. We’re working your bibles today. Go over to Jesus being betrayed, Chapter 18. The soldiers come, Judas is there with a band. He kisses him. They know who it is. In verse 4 it says: Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am.” Now, it says “he,” but if you look at your footnote it’s not “I am he.” It’s: “I am!”

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “Listen, I am,” they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again: “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and he answered and said, “I told you, I am, so if you seek me, let these men go.” Follow this. The great I am, the author of life, the self-existent one, puts on flesh, walks this earth, veiling his glory. The great I am lays down his life for his friends, for you, and for me. And the moment when he’s betrayed, Jesus says to his accusers, “You are coming after the I am? Here I am. Take me and let them go.” Right to the end Jesus lays down his life for his friends. He does it on the cross, but he does it even before that. He gives them an out and they are scattered. He takes the blow and gives them the way to escape. That is the gospel over and over again. The innocent suffer so that the guilty go free.

Jesus, the faithful one, stands there defending them, even when they are faithless, fleeing from him. Even when Peter is just about to deny him three times, Jesus stands there and says, “I am. I am here and I am willing to lay down my life for you, my friends.” And even better than that, if you can believe it, he lays down his life for his enemies. Jesus lays down his life, not only for his friends, not only for those 11, not only for those here that love him.

Listen, if you’re here this morning and you say, “I don’t know. I don’t know where I stand with God. I’ve done a lot of bad things. Sometimes I’m angry. Sometimes I even feel like God is angry at me” -- Jesus died to make even his enemies his friends, that we would have peace with God. “Rarely,” in Romans, Paul writes, “will someone lay down their life for another person, perhaps for a friend. But God shows his own love for us in that Jesus died for us when we were his enemies.” That is good news. If you abide in Jesus Christ, you are connected to that great love. That life is yours. His cleansing word is yours. The fruit that he wants to bear in your life is yours.

And fifth and finally:

V: Abiding in the true vine, Jesus Christ, unites us to his full joy.

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## Life In His Name - The True Vine

John 15:1-17 | Sunday, May 21, 2017 | By Stefan Bomberger



Verse 11: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” All that Jesus is telling us here about abiding in him, finding life in him, a fruitfulness in him, the pruning of the Father in him, the love of God flowing through your lives, that you love him, he loves you, you are laying down your life for others -- Jesus says, “I say all of these things so that my joy may be in you. My joy may be in you, and in you, and in you.” Think about that! God is an ocean, right? God is an ocean of love and of joy, and we are these tiny little Dixie cups, and he wants to pour his joy into you, overflowing, that your joy may be full.

You know, I was wrestling through this passage, thinking, “You know what? One of the things that’s so cool about this passage (think about this, church) – you might be tempted to read this and be like: “Alright, Jesus is saying I’ve got to bear fruit. I’ve got to bear fruit. I’ve got to bear fruit for God. That’s what I’ve got to do. I’ve got to bear fruit for him to prove that I’m saved. I’ve got to bear fruit. If that’s what you walk away with from this, you’ve missed the heart of it. Because we’re not just bearing fruit for God, though we are. You get to enjoy the fruit. You are bearing fruit for God, but you are bearing fruit for you.

I said earlier with Israel, the sign of God’s blessing was that you had a fruitful life. God is showing you through this story, through Jesus speaking to you, how you can have a fruitful life, full of the love of the Father, full of his joy overflowing in your life, and you get to partake of that in this life and into the next. It all starts and ends by simply abiding in Jesus, by finding Jesus Christ, by hiding yourself in him and in his love. The joy of the Lord will be your strength, if you come to him.

So how I want to end this sermon, and how we end all our sermons, is by giving you the opportunity to find your life in Jesus. For some of us, that’s a recommitment, to say, “Lord, I’m distracted. I just want to make sure that I’m in you.” But there are some here this morning, maybe for the first time, as you’ve heard this you say, “I need Christ. I need Jesus. I need to find my life in him. I need to abide in him. I believe that he laid down his life for me.” The bible says if you place your faith in Jesus, if you trust in him, if you put your confidence in him, you turn from yourself to Jesus, you have the gift of eternal life.