

Do you know what today is? Yes, Cinco de Mayo but it is also Orthodox Easter. For our family, this is cause for a wonderful family feast and tradition. As we have two granddaughters in college who are taking finals, we will postpone our celebration until May 18th, a day when we can all gather. This means a whole lot of cooking and baking for me. Dozens of Greek cookies, baklava, and the list goes on. I have passed along a few recipes, but Ted bought a book for me called Yiayias, which means grandmothers in Greek and it has their recipes. I got a great idea – create my own Yiayia’s Favorite Recipes. I want to make it and give it to each family for Christmas and tell them I will need help next Greek Easter because I am not getting any younger!! We need to pass on our things as we get older or when the end is near or things will be lost forever. This is what today’s reading is about.

The reading from John is part of the Upper Room discourses. This is when Jesus and the disciples are dining on Thursday night of Passover. Jesus knows his time is coming soon and he is trying to impart all that he can to them because he knows how difficult it will be for the disciples when he is gone. In the preceding chapter, Jesus tells the disciples, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments”. Jesus goes on to promise them that the Father will send them another Advocate to be with them forever. That Advocate is the Holy Spirit, who will teach them everything and remind the disciples of all that Jesus said to them. Jesus lets them know the hour is coming when he will be leaving them and going to the Father. Judas has already left them, and Jesus says, “Rise, let us be on our way.” Then they head off toward the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus once again uses a parable to explain he is the true vine. In the Greek, they use the word *authentic*, which Jesus is – authentic. The vine has been used as a symbol of Israel in the Old Testament (Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21) but Israel has been disobedient and unfruitful so not a true vine, but Jesus refers to himself as the authentic vine. Why? Because he is without blemish, he has done and is doing what his Father has asked of him.

The one thing we know about parables is there are always a lesson that Jesus is teaching. What is the lesson here?

1. Jesus and the disciples have a close relationship – Jesus is the vine, His Father is the grower. The believers of Jesus are the branches – the branches that **depend** on the main vine stem to survive! The branches draw their strength and their nutrients from the vine stem, without it, the branches will wither and die. We know the vine stem is strong, strong enough to hold branches that are heavily laden with fruit. We are the branches – the branches who should produce fruit. The closer the branches are to the vine, the sturdier they are and the more fruit they produce.
2. Jesus explains that branches will need to be pruned or cleansed. The Father does the cleansing or pruning to help the branches grow even more fruit. Any gardener knows that when plants get “leggy”, you need to cut back or prune them. When you do that, they are closer to the main stem and thicken up and get stronger. Sometimes as Christians, we start off strong staying connected to

Christ, but then as time goes on, we are less regular in our prayers, less fervent in our prayers and start to move away. That is when we need to be pruned – to take away the distractions and bring us in closer to Christ.

In *Living on the Edge by Chip Ingram*, Chip believes God is pruning you to see your priorities. “God says, “Yes, there is a lot of fruit. But I’d like to see more fruit because I love you.”

“When pruning occurs, significant portions of a plant are sacrificed to allow for more fruit to grow. In the same way, when He prunes your life, He wants to **chop off significant obstacles that are stunting the growth of fruit.**

Have you ever felt like you’re trying to juggle all these balls, managing family, church, work, marriage, and money, and your life is a whirlwind of activity? God’s telling you to prune. It’s not just church -

- Do you find time to regularly pour into important relationships, like scheduling coffee with friends?
- Are you participating in church activities and finding ways to use your gifts on a regular basis?
- Is there time within your day to hang out with your immediate family and be available for meaningful conversations?

If your answers are no, these are signs that your life needs pruning. Once your life has been pruned, you’ll be able to have a single focus of *bearing fruit for Him*.

3. Then there are those branches (Christians) who don’t “walk the talk”. They call themselves Christians, but they bear no fruit. They do not stay connected to Christ even though they may be baptized but their relationship is weak. Some They lack grace in their hearts, their faith is something they talk about, but it is just talk. They are not close to Christ, nor do they follow his words and these are the branches that will be “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned”, because they bear no fruit.
4. Jesus comforts the disciples by telling them that they have already been cleansed by the word he has given them but he stresses the need for them to abide in Him. I am going to read the Message translation of our reading because I like some of the wording.

The Vine and the Branches (15: 1-4)

15 ¹⁻³ “I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

⁴“Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

“Live in me – make your home in me” – that is so poignant and so clear! If we live in Jesus, really have Him in our hearts and minds, then it is easy to know how to go forth and produce fruit. We cannot pick Jesus up when we need him like when something goes wrong in our lives, or we really need a prayer answered, then when things get better, we pull away because we don't need him anymore. We can do it ourselves.

He warns them about trying to go it alone because He has been their life source – the source of their strength, their hope, their joy.

This is true for us today because we live in a society that thinks we can do it all ourselves, all on our own. It's so easy to think we can face every challenge in life and just handle it especially if we have faced other challenges and been successful at handling those challenges but sometimes, we are completely overwhelmed, and it is just too tough.

When someone is having a difficult time, we casually give the advice to “hang in there.” Those are not very helpful words for one who desperately wonders how to do just that. Jesus offers so much more than hanging in there. Yes, hard times will invariably come, but living, abiding, finding our home in Jesus the vine and God the grower sustains us, promoting even greater well-being.

We have talked about bearing fruit but what are these fruits?

The Fruit of the Spirit, as Paul explained in Galatians 5: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” You can't see these fruits the way you can see grapes, but they are so important to the kind of person we are, and what we show the world.

The fruit of Prayer and Praise – Before we begin asking of God, we must remember to thank God for all our blessings , Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name” (Hebrews 13:15). When we pray, we need to pray fervently and continuously. Jesus said, “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7)

The fruit of Good Deeds - Ephesians 2:10 reads: “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 provides a powerful reminder that each person is created with purpose and intentionality by God. We are called to use our skills and abilities to do good works in the workplace, at home, in our neighborhoods and in our churches which God has

already prepared for us in advance. Our good deeds will not be the same as everyone else, we all have the ability to make contributions, but together, abiding in Christ, we are nothing short of amazing.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12: ¹²There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. ¹³We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. ¹⁴So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts. And in 12:27: ²⁷You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

If you take away only one thing from this sermon, remember Jesus is trying to impart this wisdom to stay connected to him always. In spite of the road that lies ahead for him, he is worried about his disciples and the main message is: ⁴"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." We must stay connected to Jesus today, tomorrow and always.

1 John 4 tells us that God is love and God showed **his** love for us by sending his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.