

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 14, 2022
Scripture: John 15: 1-11

Sermon: The Season of Fruit

I love Summer with all the fruit and vegetables that you can purchase at the roadside markets. It is amazing to also watch the vineyards growing their grapes as I drive around here. The owners prune them back and they almost look dead but then Spring comes, and the green shoots start forming, and now they are full of leaves and grapes that they are ready to harvest.

Grapes are an amazing fruit. Grapes are actually berries. The word “*berry*” actually meant “*grape*” in Old English. Today, a grape is still defined as a type of berry. This means that each fruit comes from a single flower on the grapevine.

Table and wine grapes are different. Table grapes, or those you eat raw, are distinctly different. They have a thin skin, and over the years, farmers have bred them to be seedless or have very small seeds. Wine grapes, on the other hand, are smaller and have thicker skins and lots of seeds.

Most researchers believe grapes are at least 65 million years old. Some of today’s grape varieties are direct descendants of these ancient grapes.

There are more than 8,000 different grape varieties known to scientists. These include wine grapes and table grapes, most of which originated in Europe and the Americas.

The *United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization* keeps track of growing areas around the world and reports that 29,292 square miles of the Earth’s surface are devoted to growing grapes. Top producers include Spain, Italy, China, and Turkey.

You can grow grapes almost anywhere in the United States. However, different grape varieties are best suited to certain climates, so it's important to know about the best variety for your area.

You can also have too many grapes on a vine, which can detract from the quality of the fruit. Depending on the variety, each cluster of grapes may have between 15-300 individual berries. You should trim away flowers or grape clusters that don't look healthy so others can grow healthier.

The United States is the world's largest importer of grapes for eating. Just a few years ago the US imported 568,000 tons of table grapes.

It takes about 90 pounds of grapes to make five gallons or about 25 bottles of wine. That is more than three and a half pounds of grapes per bottle.

These are just a lot of fun facts about grapes for you to know.

Well, what did the Vine represent in the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, the metaphor of vine and the vineyard is used quite often to describe Israel. **Israel is the vine which God has planted.** In Psalm 80, the psalmist says to God: You brought us from Egypt as though we were a tender grapevine; you drove away the pagan nations; you cleared the ground for us, and we took root and filled the land."

Our passage today from John 15 teaches us that the Savior used the grapevine as a metaphor to explain the nature of His relationship with those who were His disciples and those who would become his disciples. Prior to leaving for Gethsemane and then to the cross, the Savior taught the disciples how they must live if they were to continue to be His disciples.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is walking with his disciples, passing through the vineyards. Jesus picked up a cutting from the vine and turned to his disciples. "You know Israel is pictured as a vine which is to produce refreshing fruit, But Israel failed. I am the true Vine as opposed to a mere copy or symbol. I am the true one."

Israel, as a vine, never achieved her goal. She was a failure. However, the Lord Jesus Christ who came as the True Vine accomplished all that God intended his Messiah to do. The Vine stands for the Messiah. In him the true destiny of Israel is fulfilled. Jesus is the genuine Vine.

In John 14:10-11, Jesus said, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me." Jesus was in complete communion with the Father. John 10:30 says, "I and the Father are one." The Father and the Son are always working together as one.

With the vine, Jesus illustrated the most fundamental and basic secret of the Christian life. Jesus says this is the secret of the Christian life: "You in Me, and I in you." The basic idea is union with Christ and having a special connection and relationship with him.

Last week we talked about our bodies being the Temple of God and caring for it. Just like you have to carefully take care of the vine, the stem and the root, you need to care for the branches that bring forth fruit. The root needs to be grounded in the right soil and the stem needs to be healthy so that the pruned branches can bear fruit.

God expected Israel to produce luscious, beautiful, rich, choice grapes of righteousness but instead produced sour, rotten, tasteless grapes.

John 15:2 says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."

When you are pruning a tree, first, all dead wood must be removed, and the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood allows insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, to say nothing of being unproductive. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into fruit.

When I drive here, I see the vineyards, and in early Spring, the vineyard looks like a collection of barren stems, and at the end of Summer, they are filled with beautiful grapes. As the farmer puts the pruning knife to his vines, so, God cuts dead wood so far that it doesn't

look like anything will grow back, but from it yields the greatest fruitfulness.

Our Heavenly Father must cleanse us all so we will bear more fruit. He finds a branch that is producing fruit, and He begins to cut it back so it will bear more fruit in the likeness of Christ. Our Heavenly Father finds a branch that is beginning to bear fruit, beginning to produce the likeness of Christ, and He cuts it back, trims off shoots, so we will bear more fruit. God wants to cut out everything in our lives that is opposed to Christ-likeness. Pruning takes place over a period of time and over a lifetime. Slowly and surely God's Word is at work in our hearts pruning, cleansing, and causing us to bear fruit. God cuts out the things of the world and replaces it with the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

God expects the Fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives to be healthy and overflowing. The fruit of the vine will be the natural outflow of life being connected to the vine. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches.

One thing we must see in this chapter is that God is serious about fruit in our lives. He's serious about wanting to transform our life, our heart, and our character to be in relationship with God.

God is serious about the fruit in our lives, and he wants us to trust in him for everything in our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

"Abide in Me" says Jesus. That is the secret – the key! Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. Unless you abide on the vine, you have no life and will wither and die.

As you abide in the vine, God wants you to be full of Joy. Verse 11 is key, "These things I have spoken that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

What a way to joy as you abide in the vine. Being filled with the Joy of the Lord is a much better way to live than what the world has to

offer. If you don't abide in the vine, the alternative is eternal separation from God, and apart from God, we can do nothing.

We are to abide in Christ. That is ACTIVE, something we do. We are also to let him abide in us which is PASSIVE. Both of these are essential if we are to live the Christian life.

We must make choices and determine to follow and to abide in Jesus. The quality of your Christian life depends on the quality of your connection with Christ. When we abide in Christ, we are at the center of God's will. It is impossible to abide in Christ and be outside of His will. When we abide in Him, he opens our spiritual eyes to see where he is working. We can work and work, but if we aren't in God's will, then we won't produce any fruit.

Jesus said, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love."

May our hearts be moved by the love that God has for us to spend our lives abiding in Him.

Our love for Christ is the result of His sacrificial love for us.

So, when you drive by the vineyards around here remember John 15. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches.

This is the season of fruit.