

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Pruning for Promise

John 15:1-8

Fifth Sunday of Easter analysis by Cathy Lessmann

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.

4 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. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

DIAGNOSIS: Perishing in the Pruning

Step 1-Initial Diagnosis : *Trying to live off our own fruit*

There is something amiss in the branches. As the Vinedresser looks to his branches, there is something missing: productivity. Their fruits, and they may be many, are only giving the appearance of being genuine fruit. That is because these

branches are trying to show off their own fruit and make that the basis of their worthiness. However, this fruit is accurately defined by Jesus as “nothing” (v. 5). However good it may appear on the outside, it lacks any genuine fruitfulness. There is no love to be found in them.

Step 2-Advanced Diagnosis : *Improper Fertilization*

As one traces the root of these branches, the Vinedresser finds that the branch is corrupted because the fertilization is corrupt. Such branches are self-fertilized, relying on the fertilizer of one’s own sense of worthiness or some other sense of worthiness than the Vinedresser has in mind. Sadly, these alternate fertilizers are void of substantial nourishment. In the Church, members who no longer “abide in” (trust in, get their substance from) Jesus have lost their nourishment source, and hence their ability to bear good fruit (v. 4). Jesus says, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (v 5). John was probably referring to the Christians overcome by persecution who had fallen away and consequently ceased trusting Jesus. Fallen-away Christians are plentiful today too, probably not because of persecution, but because the temptations and enticements of “other fertilizers” are just too strong. These “others” might include our own selves, our prosperity, even God’s own Law.

Step 3-Final Diagnosis : *Trashed and Burned*

No surprise then that the Vinedresser prunes off (as in cuts off) not just the sham fruit, but the whole branch as well, and trashes them both. Not only are these branches useless, but they hinder healthy branches, and therefore must go. This pruning is deadly when the bad branches are “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (v. 6). The tragedy of those in the Church originally connected to their Vine Jesus who cease “abiding” in Him is that they forfeit an inheritance that already was theirs.

PROGNOSIS: The Pruning that is Promising

Step 4-Initial Prognosis : *Cleansed by Jesus*

Yet note how it is that Vinedresser sends instead his own Branch and Offspring, the True Vine. This One is himself pruned and trashed upon the cross for the very sake of the vineyard. Instead of being pruned, as in “cut off,” there is the option of being “cleansed” (both meanings of “pruning” have the same Greek root word, *katherei*). And wouldn’t you know, this True Vine is intricately involved in that cleansing on behalf of His branches. This One is himself pruned and trashed upon the cross for the very sake of the vineyard, in order that the vineyard may grow from his life-giving nourishment as his branches. “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you (v. 3)” Jesus says. Here is the One who “laid down his life for his friends” (v. 13) in order that his friends might live.

Step 5-Advanced Prognosis : *Life-giving Fertilizer*

The pruned, cleansed, branch begins to drink in – maybe even gulp in – the life-giving fertilizer from the Vine. A miraculous recovery occurs. Branches that once were dead now get new life, and grow by their trusting in this True Vine as their source of life. “Abide in me, and I in you,” Jesus says (v. 4). Thus, Christians, as they trust, “abide in” him, are refreshed and revived by the life-giving nourishment of His own precious body and blood.

Step 6-Final Prognosis : *Abundant Fruits*

Trimmed, re-fertilized branches end up flourishing and bearing even more and better fruit than before. Their fruit becomes the very fruit of the Vine, which tickles the Vinedresser to no end. “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples” (v 7, 8). Their relationship is intimate, so much so that they know their hopes and prayers will be listened to and acted upon. “Ask whatever you will, and it

shall be done for you.” (v. 7). They even see the pruning as for their own good – “every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (v. 2). With Jesus’ love and forgiveness surging through their veins, pruned Christians blossom with fruit reflective of their Savior, the True Vine, and get to bear their fruit for the good of all.