Sermon bear fruit

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**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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Our gospel reading today is from John 15. I'll begin with verse one. Listen with me for the word of the Lord. Jesus said, I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. every branch that bears fruit, he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I've spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches, Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers. So branches are gathered together, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, as for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. Friends this is the word of the Lord. Well, it has been counted that the strawberry capital of the world now is Cabot, Arkansas. Is that right? Jeanne? That's what I'm hearing. Cabot Arkansas, or at least our Kansans like to believe that they are the number one world's most famous strawberry producers. Now they don't have anything on us. We're the sweet potato capitals here folk in Mississippi, right, we've got some stuff we're known for too. But it is understandable that the strawberries in Arkansas are something to be held. They are immaculate, there's a place called Holland bottom farms that they get into the science of strawberry grown I didn't know there was a science. They make sure all the chemicals are right, they plant them on black plastic so that they can deter more or deter the weed infestation. They fight the insects they do everything they can to make the most beautiful, the largest, and most importantly, right? The most tasteful strawberries there are. But of all those tricks of trade that they do, and I'm sure they're aware of seasons, those producers, they're in Harlem, Holland, bottom, strawberry or farms. The most important aspect we all know, as gardeners or even if we don't have a green thumb, is that to produce the fruit most importantly, the strawberry has to stay in the vine, right? No matter what kind of chemicals you place on, if you pick the berry prematurely lay it down on the ground, it's no longer connected to the vine to its LifeSource it will not grow and it will not produce fruit. Well, we understand that and strawberries and planting and other garden, vegetables and fruits. But Jesus takes this imagery, this example and shares with us today. How we to as the church are called to be fruit to the world outside of these walls, to give life beauty, goodness, even beyond the taste of a strawberry to nurture our brother and sister around us and to grow God's love to all people. You know, I find it interesting that as we think of the berry or any fruit that's growing, as long as it stays in the vine, it's continuing to grow and will ultimately produce life. And as I shared shared the moment it's pick, you know it begins well, it begins dying. But if it stays rooted in the vine, the vine that gives life it will continue to give forth life now I know there's master gardeners out there that would say to me, well you know if you leave it on the vine all the way through is eventually going to wither on the vine to can ever have any fun when there's Master Gardeners around Kenya. I get that I understand but ultimately Even if it does wither on the vine, the fruit, we know what will happen then right, the seeds will go down into the earth, germinate and give forth even more alive than they had within themselves as one little seed or piece of fruit. Wow, there is a great life giving source, when the fruit is connected to the vine, and we too old church, have a gift to give, when we stay connected to the vine life giving love of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, at the end of the day, at the end of the day, if we simplify our faith to its core, we are in the words of Jesus here called to make disciples and bear fruit to the world around him. What does that mean? You know, if we read the Gospel of John lives, remember this story, this story here in John 15, we just celebrated during our Easter season, as we journey toward Holy Thursday, Monday, Thursday, and we heard about Jesus washing his disciples feed right, then breaking bread and giving them to cup and saying, my body is broken for you. And then his last message, you remember it? His last message on that fateful night that this scripture is consistent with as he's preaching here to them. Now, his last message is this. If you do this, you will be my disciples if you keep my commandments. And then he goes on to say this, this right here is my commandment, that you love one another. See, I understand it to say that's the only commandment Jesus ever gave. Because he says here later in John, He says, I kept my father's commandments. And if you keep my commandments, then the world will know you are my disciples, You are fruit bears. And here it is, he simplifies it. This is my commandment, to make it really easy for you, it all comes down to love. And that's the easy part, right? But the complexity comes in when Jesus pushes us just a little bit, challenges us a little more fervently to consider Tommy, who it is that we're called to love. called to love them all. called to love them at their worst rosemary and thanks be to God. We are called to do that because we too, are loved at our worst. See, God claimed me to the gospel ministry, not when I was at my best friends, when I was a rogue and ruffian as our friends in England would say about an outcast. Even at that moment, God saw in me someone Lin worthy to produce fruit and represent him with love in a world and as I received His forgiveness, and acceptance, I wanted to share it with all around regardless. Got A Friend in ministry, some of you know that I serve in my day job as president of Memphis Theological Seminary. We've had some world class graduates there. One of our great graduates I had a text exchange with this week and he and I will share sermon ideas and just discuss things from here and there. You may have heard of him, his name's Andy Stoddard. He's kind of a big deal if you hadn't heard of him. And he was reflecting in this sermon that he was writing, he said, quoted one of our former professors, Dr. Nick Knickerbocker. Nick started out a long time ago as a United Methodists. He eventually became a Pisco, pagan, and ultimately returned to the Mother Church itself and became Roman Catholic. Nick and his wife, Sandy are two of the holiest, beautiful, gracious people you'll ever meet. And Andy said in the sermon that we were reflecting on he said, My, my congregation often hears me pray this prayer. God, we pray for those that no one else prays for. And you've heard me utter that prayer too. And I'd forgotten where that prayer came from. Our dear friend Nick Knickerbocker, who said that's what it means to love. It's not you Just giving all of our care and concern for the other, but giving all of our care and concern is specially for those. No one else loves, and is willing to welcome as a part of the church. See, we are the broken and the outcast, knowing that God looked upon us in our most sinful state in our most broken part of us in saw those worthy to be restored. And he calls us church, to be fruit, to be fruit that will last you know, I love that to be fruit that will last as I said, means that we stay in the vine. And as long as we as the church, stay rooted in Jesus Christ, we will be fruitful. And how do we stay rooted in him? Let's simplify it again. We do his commandment we love love them all. All the time. Regard regardless, for they are children of God. We have a beautiful floral arrangement today. Y'all see that? Oh, and I didn't even think it was real. I walked in this morning, I thought, well, we get tight on our flower budget lens. Don't put some fake flowers out there. And Wigington they look so beautiful. They don't even look real. That's a compliment. Sometime man, you said I mess up my compliments. I don't know if that's really a compliment. That is a full compliment. And when you do when it looks so good, you can't even tell if it's real flower is something I'm gonna try not to mess this up. It's amaryllis. Did I get it? Right? My inflicting kind of doubting is something like that. And you know, I guess those Amaryllis would look pretty, no matter how the who grew them, or where they were grown. But my friend, and Wigington has a special green thumb. And I know she has treated those things and nurtured those things and love those flowers in a way to bring forth their beauty. In a way they wouldn't had she not been there to care for them, don't you think? See, Jesus not only spoke with the vine today, hidden the fruit and the flower. But he spoke of the vine grower saying our father comes to us even as we are fragile, maybe even weeds in through his love proves us nurtures us in sees the beauty we can become with his caregiving. And if we entrust ourselves to the true Master Gardener. Brands it sets that simple. If you've never began that journey, begin it today. And if you haven't heard it in a long time, know the promise is still true. God's grace is sufficient always for what we have been, what we are and what we will be. But we're His children of the Most High God. Starting to talking about flowers we we can't stop now I visited with my friend Shirley Huddleston back there before worship. We sang a song together. I asked surely I said what's your favorite song? She said in the garden. I come to the garden alone, right Shirley with the do still on the roses. Because that's the place that I remember. He walks with me. He talks with me. He tells me I'm as old friends as we've been claimed as he is. Can we go forth and claim them out there as ours to worthy of love simply for being children of the gardener of a soul? All