

Healthy Branches**1. Remain Connected to the Vine 2. Bear Fruit for the Gardener***Healthy Branches on My Tomato Plant*

- This is tomato plant. Like toms, so few days ago went garden center (gc) down road, purchased this tom plant. On this plant, you've got main stalk/vine; little branches; hopefully, if I take care, water, later on this summer enjoy fruit of this plant: juicy, red toms. Come to find out: lot of varieties; this one: "super fantastic" (says on tag). Thought: how go wrong?! Problem: I've killed lot houseplants in my day. Think lady at gc must have sensed that, or had some inkling that plants are in mortal danger when around me, bec when saw me with plant, asked, "Do you know what doing with that?" Went on to explain: keep inside until warm, plant in sun, trim these branches, plant deep; then roots grow. Eager to learn, bec I want my tom plant to have healthy branches (HB) and bear lovely fruit.
- What Jesus wants too: not "super fantastic" toms, but HB that bear lovely fruit. Today Jesus talks re HB in Jn 15, in the famous v/b discourse, which Jesus speaks on MT, night before his crucifixion. So one of last things Jesus teaches discs before he dies for them is that he wants Christians to be HB who remain con to vine, and bear fruit for gardener.

Healthy Branches Remain Connected to the Vine

- That's why says, **vs. 5ab, 4a**. HB "**remain**" in vine = stay connected to source of life, strength. Plants (like this tom plant) send nutrients out to all their branches to keep plant healthy, strong – like how our heart pumps blood throughout body to keep us healthy, strong. That's how Xianity works, as well. Jesus is vine, source of life/strength; sends out a flow of gracious nutrients to his branches (to you, me) to make our faith (connection to vine) healthy, strong. And when these gracious nutrients are flowing from Jesus, to us; when there's a steady stream of God's grace coursing through us by faith, Jesus has HB con to vine.
- As a Xian, you are HB, con to vine. Jesus grew you, out of himself. But warning here not to let this happen. Discon. **Vs. 5bc**. Apart from vine, this branch is dead. May not look dead (still looks healthy, green). But pretty soon: shrivel, die bec discon from vine. Jesus does not want this happen to you. Why there's an urgent warning here about "remaining" in vine. **Vs. 4a**. But problem is that for so many: this happens. Person: baptized as child, comes church with parents, maybe goes Luth school, confirmed in Luth church; they understand that Jesus is Savior from sin, sincerely believe Gospel. But somewhere along way, this happens! I bet you can think of someone who was Xian, but isn't anymore; or someone who's strayed away from Jesus, practically never some church anymore; they're like broken branch, barely hanging onto vine. On outside, may look healthy, green; but in reality in danger of this. If you discon yourself from Jesus, you become this. And Jesus warns, **vs. 6**.
- So main point here is: there's nothing more imp than faith in Jesus. Jesus wants us to be HB who remain con to vine, who stay attached to one who shed blood on cross, rose from dead to make us his branches. HB remain con to vine. How we do that? On own we can't, anymore than branches can. Branches don't produce their life; they receive life from vine. So with us: when we receive Gospel from Jesus (lot of ways that happens: worship at church, sermons in church, Bible classes, Bible reading, devotion time, HC, reflecting on your baptism) – when we receive Gospel from Jesus, and that Gospel flows through us (like nutrients through tom plant), Jesus keeps us con to vine. Why coming to church is big deal; and why skipping church is big deal. Matter of life and death. **Vs. 4a**. Jesus is going to hold onto you; just don't cut yourself off from him. HB remain con to vine.

Healthy Branches Bear Fruit for the Gardener

- And HB bear fruit for gardener. **Vs. 1**. Here's what gardener does: **vs. 2**. Right off bat, can tell: gardener wants fruit. This whole passage talks re producing fruit: **vs. 4b, 5b, 8a**. So the way to glorify heavenly gardener: bear much fruit. This plant, I hope, will bear much fruit, and I'll have some fresh

toms. Xians bear fruit, too – by doing the things God loves. That’s what bearing fruit for gardener means: doing things God loves. You can think of fruit of Spirit from **Gal 5: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22)**. Or John Baptist, **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Mt 3:8)**. Or Jesus, **“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (Lk 6:43-44)**. And there’s that parable Jesus told re what happens when you don’t bear fruit: **“A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” (Lk 13:6-9)**.

- It’s very clear that God wants fruit. And not just any fruit, but good fruit. This means we have to look at lives, ask ourselves hard question: what kind of fruit am I producing? Am I producing: fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness? Or rotten, nasty fruit? Or no fruit at all? **Vs. 1b-2a** – bec it’s dead branch, dead wood, good for nothing but fire. This is picture of unbelief; but it’s scary, bec I know myself, and I know you; and I know we are very good at producing nasty fruit (with our sins), or no fruit at all (with our complacency, lack of caring). These words of Jesus insist that we do some self-examination and repent, bec gardener wants good fruit.
- **Vs. 2b**. Lady at gc told me snip off some these buds here so fruit can grow here. Jesus saying: God may need to snip off some buds here (hearts) so fruit can grow here (hands). It’s God’s pruning; sometimes it hurts. But God always prunes us for our good, to grow our faith, increase our fruit. Keep that in mind when something bad happens to you, troubles come into life: God may be using pruning shears on you, so that your faith can grow, and you can bear fruit.
- All kinds diff fruits you can produce, bec we’re all diff types of branches. Some branches produce toms, grapes; others watermelons, pumpkins, apples, oranges, even flower petals. And diff Xians produce diff kinds of fruits, as well. Some fruits you can see: like when serve Lord by serving neighbor, with generosity, compassion, volunteerism, genuine kindness – those are fruits you can see. Also fruits you can’t see: like when fight against powerful temptation to sin, or patiently bear a cross Lord lays on your shoulders, or when do right thing but aren’t recognized for it – all these are fruits can’t see. But gardener does. Basically, when put faith into action, out of love for Jesus, that faith-in-action is God-pleasing fruit. **Vs. 8**.

Simple Illustration, Profound Truth

- Really, it’s simple illustration Jesus makes today, but profound truth: Christians are like branches. Branches on this tom plant: con to vine, and I hope this summer bear fruit. So it is with us: HB remain con to vine, JC. And HB bear fruit for gardener, God the Father. Simple illustration, but profound truth. Apart from vine we shrivel, die. But by God’s grace, Jesus has made us HB. Jesus grew us out of himself, and his life-sustaining grace is pulsating through us by faith. So remain con to Jesus, and keep bearing fruit. **Vs. 5**. May God bless all of us to be and remain HB.

John 15:1-8

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”