

We are still in the Easter season and we celebrate our redemption which began with the defeat of Satan, sin and death on the cross. However our redemption is not only a past act, it has to be lived in the present through our life in union with Christ so that our redemption will be complete in the future. How do we live our life in union with Christ?

In John's gospel, Jesus again, uses one of the "I AM" claims to teach us about how to live a life in union with Christ. He proclaims, "I am the living vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so it will be more fruitful. Here again we see one of Jesus's radical claims of being the source of life. He compares himself to the vine and his Father as the gardener. As disciples they were expected to bear fruit, fruit of the Holy Spirit replicating the character and life of Jesus. If the disciples do not bear fruit then they are cut off, but if they do bear fruit then they are pruned in order that they may bear more fruit. Pruning sometimes can be a painful exercise. Scientists tell us that sometimes that when a tree does not bear fruit, a deep cut is made at the base of the tree and then the following year the tree begins to bear fruit. It seems almost as though the entire tree spurts with full energy to make sure that the tree survives to bring about fruits. Similarly, in our own lives God takes us through severe circumstances where we feel we have lost everything but God brings beautiful fruit in our lives following that.

Jesus tells his disciples that they were already clean because of the word that he had spoken to them. The word refers to the Gospel - the story of salvation. The disciples had accepted and received the gospel and therefore were clean. However, they were to remain in him in order to continue bearing fruit. He said to them: "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 if you do not remain in me." Jesus again draws the parallel with the vine and the branches. For the branches to bear fruit, they had to be rooted and grounded in the vine. Likewise, the disciples too would bear fruit if they were connected to the source of life- Jesus himself. He tells them very clearly that if they remain in him they would bear much fruit. Apart from him they can do nothing. We see that in the life of the disciples as they become overconfident at times without being connected to Jesus and find themselves failing. The challenge for us as well is to know that we too cannot bear fruit in our spiritual lives without being connected to Jesus.

Jesus goes on to say that if we do not believe in him we are like branches that are thrown away. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. However Jesus says if we remain in him and his words remain in us then we can ask for whatever we wish and it will be done for us. Remaining in Christ involves remaining in his words. His words are given to us in scripture and therefore we are expected to read, meditate, obey and live according to his words. When we live according to his words then what we ask is also according to his will and therefore we can ask with boldness and confidence.

Jesus also tells his disciples that just as the Father loved him and he loved the Father so also has he loved them. In order to remain in his love they were to keep his commands. As we continue to work out our salvation in union with Christ may we learn to be obedient with him and to keep his commandments. Obedience is the litmus test of love. If we love him we will keep his commands. May God the Holy Spirit help us to be obedient to him so that our redemption will be made complete