

Pastor Writes

The theme for our morning's meditation is 'Our redemption is completed through life in union with Christ.' The word 'redeem' actually is a slave market term used when a slave who is under bondage is bought with a price and then set free. Jesus Christ is our redeemer because he has redeemed us from the bondage of sin and has set us free. However, for that redemption to be completed we are called to be union with Christ.

The reading from John's gospel chapter 15 tells us what it means to be united with Christ. Jesus begins his discourse saying, 'I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.' This is the last of the seventh 'I am' sayings. The discourse probably continues from the Last Supper. Jesus claims to be the true vine as opposed to Israel who was called to be the vine but failed in their responsibilities. Jesus is the source of our life and also sustains our lives. By claiming himself to be the true vine Jesus confirms that he reveals that which is divine. He possesses the truth and reveals the truth about God.

Jesus then says that his Father is the gardener who prunes the vines. He cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit and prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it would be even more fruitful. What is the fruit that God is looking for in our lives? Galatians 5: 22 says that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. In the other three gospels bearing fruit means that God expects good works after repentance and failure to do them will lead to the God's judgment which results in being separated from the community and consigned to complete judgment and destruction. In John's gospel the meaning seems to denote all aspects of the Christian life lived in closed communion with Christ. Those who bear fruit reproduce Jesus's life through which the Father will be glorified. Bearing fruit is an indication of a changed life when we leave behind our old lifestyle and habits. Jesus says that the Father prunes the branches so that we may bear much fruit. God prunes us through difficult situations, through sickness, and sometimes even through the death of loved ones. Pruning may be a painful exercise but God does take us through it so that the deadwood that saps our energy will fall by the side and we will begin to bear fruit. It is like the work of a skilled surgeon who has to remove a certain cancer from our bodies – the cancer of sinful habits, sinful desires, sinful thoughts and words. God operates on us that we may be healed.

What is the secret of fruit bearing? The secret of fruit bearing is to remain in Christ and to remain in his love. He says, 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. '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' (John 15:4-5). Remaining in Christ is the key to fruit bearing. Just as sap flows from the vine to all its branches so life for the church flows from Jesus. God is the one who has brought this union into effect when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus. For remaining in Christ we are to consistently make decisions to follow Christ in every situation. We are called to walk according to his will and to keep his commands. Fruit bearing cannot be achieved with our own efforts but with the help of the Holy Spirit. The negative side is also explicitly stated, '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' (John 15:6).

The promise is that if we remain in him, and his words remain in us then we can ask for whatever we wish because it will be in line with God's will and he will grant it to us. Jesus again reminds us to obey his commands to remain in his love, just as he kept his Father's commands and remained in his love. May we truly complete our redemption as we stand steadfast and remain in the True-Vine – Jesus.

Shalom

Paul Swarup

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