

**“Branches Glorifying God”**  
**John 15:1-12 Pt 1**  
**October 25, 2020**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

We return to the Gospel of John, chapter fifteen – in the middle of Jesus’s farewell discourse to his disciples.

We will spend two Sundays on these verses, focusing on the first half this morning, and the second half next Lord’s Day. And despite the fact that all seventeen verses are printed for you in the bulletin, I’m actually just going to read verses one through twelve this morning.

With that said, we turn to John 15:1-12.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

Jesus said to them:

<sup>15:1</sup>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

<sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, we gather this morning because we love your Word.  
We want it to be our meditation day and night.  
We know that your revelation to us  
offers more wisdom than the wise of the world,  
it gives us more understanding than the great thinkers of the world,  
it gives us deeper understanding than the old and experienced of the world.  
It holds us back from evil,  
and keeps us from straying from you.

And it is sweet to us,  
sweeter than honey in our mouths.  
Through it we gain understanding,  
and we learn to reject every false way.  
Teach us now from your word, we ask.  
In Jesus's name. Amen  
[Based on Psalm 119:97-104]

## **WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?**

At the heart of our text this morning is the question: “What is the purpose of human life?”

In the book *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller discusses how every culture provides some kind of answer to this question.

And as you look at the answers different cultures have given around the world and throughout history, despite all their differences, one thing shared among them that you soon begin to see is their assumption that human life is meant to serve a purpose beyond itself – beyond the here and now. [Keller, 16]

They placed the chief end of humanity in something eternal, in a greater spiritual power, in a people of significance that would live beyond them – in some greater cosmic good to which we as individuals could contribute or participate in – something beyond ourselves. [Keller, 22]

Philosopher Charles Taylor argues that one of the most significant shifts in the modern worldview is a shift away from that perspective.

Before modernism, Taylor explains, the general understanding of the human predicament across human cultures was some sort of hierarchy of value in which we – human beings – were not at the top. There was something above us.

And it was not that previous cultures taught that human beings were without value – human life could be good, but it was not the greatest good.

But the Western world, over the last five hundred years began to claim that it was the greatest good. It began to put human flourishing – human happiness and comfort in this life – at the top of the hierarchy: as the thing that was most important. And so, no goals outranked human flourishing. Nothing could claim greater allegiance from us than human happiness and human comfort.

Before the modern era in the West, no other society had ever rooted itself in that claim. [Taylor. 18-20]

And it's a claim that has influenced everyone – that every one of us has to some extent absorbed. Most Americans still believe in God. But the way we view God and God's relationship to us has radically changed.

It used to be that people believed in God, and also believed that God was the highest good. The world was made for God. We were made for God. And we fulfilled our place in the cosmos when we served God as our highest end.

Today, many people still believe in God. But our default tendency is to see him as being there to serve us. We believe that God created the world primarily for our benefit, not for his own. We expect God to be there to serve us, rather than thinking of our primary calling as serving him. Human beings' main responsibility is not to love, worship, serve, and obey God ... but God's main role in the world is to love, support, and care for us. [Keller 53-54]

And so, many Christians today would affirm the same doctrinal tenets as Christians 500 years ago. But the *way* they believe in God – the way they see their relationship to him at a gut level – is radically different. [Keller, 57-58]

And actually seeing this can be hard for us. It's a little like a fish trying to notice water. Whether you are a Christian or not, this secular perspective tends to be your default setting.

But we can catch glimpses of it by asking a few questions.

First, what makes you mad at God? What makes you question him? Isn't it when he fails to provide happiness and comfort to human beings – whether you or someone else? You get mad that God would allow suffering into someone's life, and the very idea that there could be a higher purpose to him allowing that suffering seems preposterous to you: what could be a higher good than human flourishing – than human happiness and comfort?

Or what drives you to prayer most often? Is it thanksgiving? Is it adoration? Is it confession? Or is it asking for things – particularly things in this life? If someone looked at your pattern of prayer, would they conclude that you were there mainly to serve God or that God was there mainly to serve you?

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. We are supposed to be upset by unjust suffering in this world. We are supposed to bring our needs to God. I'm not speaking against those biblical truths.

What I'm asking is about the overall patterns of how we relate to God and what they reveal about how we view God in our hearts. And whether you think of yourself as a secular person, as “spiritual but not religious”, or as a conservative Christian, Charles Taylor, and Tim Keller, and I are all willing to bet that if you take an honest look, you see these patterns in your heart and your life. Your default view is that human happiness and comfort are the greatest goods. And so everything else, including God, is there to serve human happiness and human comfort.

### **MADE TO BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD:**

One of the most radical claims – at least for our culture – that Jesus Christ makes in our passage this morning is that God's primary purpose is not to serve us ... but our primary purpose is to serve him.

The unified claim of historic Christianity about what humanity's primary purpose is, is summed up well in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

The first question it asks is: "What is the chief end of man?"

Its answer is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

We see that answer throughout the Scriptures. And we see it right here in our text this morning.

And both aspects are important: both glorifying God and enjoying him. This morning we will focus on what our text has to say about our chief calling to glorify God. Next Lord's Day when we return to this passage, we will focus on what it says about our primary purpose of enjoying God.

In the first six verses of John 15, the focus is on the fact that glorifying God is what we were made for. We are branches on a vine, Jesus tells us. And the purpose of vine branches is to bear fruit. And what is the purpose of the fruit we bear? Jesus tells us in verse eight: our fruit glorifies God.

We can often try to center this image of the fruit and the vine on ourselves. But Jesus focuses it on the fruit – the fruit that is grown for God, the vinedresser, and which ultimately glorifies God, the vinedresser. "Bearing fruit is the point" of the metaphor. [Roberts]

Jesus tells us that our primary purpose is to bear fruit for God, and thus to glorify him.

And this picture of God's people as a vine, whose purpose is to bear fruit for God, is not new here in John 15. It comes up multiple times in the Old Testament and multiple times in Jesus's previous teaching. [Carson, 511, 513; Augustine, *Tractate LXXX.1*]

The primary purpose of human beings is to bear fruit that then glorifies God. But what is that fruit?

Jesus tells us. He tells us in verse ten that it means obeying his commandments. He tells us in verse twelve that it is loving one another. He tells us later on in the chapter that it is witnessing to others. [v.27] He tells us throughout this chapter that it is loving him and enjoying him. [Carson, 517, 520]

When we bring these together, we see that the fruit we bear that glorifies God is faithful living according to God's commands found in the Scriptures.

And glorifying God is our highest purpose because God is who he is. He is the greatest being – the greatest object in the cosmos. He is the source of all beauty, all goodness, and all truth. He is the one from whom we have our very being, and every good gift that we receive. And when we glorify God, we are simply responding rightly to who he is. We are treating him as the highest good because he is the highest good.

And as we do that, we are also acting in accordance with who we are. We are rightly fulfilling our design. Because that is what we were made for – to love and to glorify God. [Keller, 167-168]

That is what we were made for, just as a vine was made to grow grapes. And when we embrace that – when we seek to truly be what we were created to be – that is when we actually find the joy we long for.

Or, to put it another way, it is only when we stop putting human happiness as our chief end that we have a chance of finding it. It is only when we make the glory of God our highest goal that we are able to truly enjoy God as we were created to.

And so, if we want to seek to be what we were made to be, we must bear fruit for God. Which means living as God has called us to – loving God, loving those around us, following God’s commandments for us.

But ... doing that is not so easy.

Anyone who has tried to live for the glory of God – who has tried to love God with all their heart, soul mind, and strength – who has tried to love their neighbor as themselves, knows how hard it is.

So how do we do it?

Well, our text this morning tells us. It points to three things. It tells us that we need to:

- rely on the source of fruitfulness,
- cling to the structures of fruitfulness,
- and expect the shears aimed at fruitfulness.

The source of fruitfulness, the structures for fruitfulness, and the shears aimed at fruitfulness.

That’s what we’ll consider for the rest of our time this morning.

### **RELYING ON THE SOURCE OF FRUITFULNESS:**

So first, we need to rely on the source of fruitfulness.

Listen to Jesus’s words again, in verses four and five:

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus makes it clear here that our bearing fruit is completely dependent on him. “Apart from me you can do nothing” he says.

And this is a good reminder for Reformation Sunday. A branch does not grow fruit on its own. In the same way we cannot produce good works on our own. A branch doesn't bear fruit in order to receive life from the vine, but it bears fruit because it already is receiving life from the vine. In the same way, we do not do good works in order to receive life from Christ, but we will only do true good works if we already are receiving life from Christ.

A branch does nothing to "merit" its connection to the vine. In the same way, we do nothing to merit our union with Christ. It is all of grace. It is all undeserved.

The starting point is true, life-giving, union with Christ.

Attempting to bear fruit apart from that life-giving union is folly. Attempting to earn our union with Christ is also folly. Humble dependance is the only right relationship a branch can have to the vine.

If we want to bear fruit that glorifies God, the first step is humble reliance on Christ. We rely on him fully for spiritual life. We rely on him fully for spiritual growth.

This doesn't mean that we don't have an active part to play – we absolutely do – but even that must flow from our humble reliance on Christ as the source of our spiritual life.

That is the first thing we need to see here. We must rely on the source of fruitfulness: Jesus Christ, the true vine.

### **CLINGING TO THE STRUCTURES OF FRUITFULNESS:**

But practically speaking, how do we do that?

Answering that question leads us to the second thing our text has to tell us about how to bear fruit: the structures of fruitfulness.

Of course, on the deepest level, reliance on Christ is a matter of the heart. We must embrace and rest on Christ from the heart – that is essential.

But is our life-giving relationship to him all internal? Are there any concrete aspects to how we receive life from him?

Our text this morning tells us that there is.

Because in the Bible, the vine imagery that Jesus uses here is not new. It is used again, and again, and again. In the psalms [80:8], by the prophet Isaiah [5:1-7], by the prophet Jeremiah [2:21], by the prophet Ezekiel [15, 17], by the prophet Hosea [10:1-2], over and over again the Bible uses the image of a vine to refer to the people of God – to the covenant community. And Jesus expects his hearers to already know that. [Carson, 513; Collins, 48; Augustine, *Tractate LXXX.1*]

The image of the vine assumes that we are talking about not just individuals, but the people of God as a community.

And the language Jesus uses of being “in” him emphasizes that further. As Dr. Jack Collins points out, the language of being “in” is used in the Old Testament to describe when someone has a place among the people of a king. It’s used, for example, to describe those who do or don’t have a place among the people under David’s rule. And when Jesus uses it here, it carries the same meaning. And so, to have a portion in Jesus is to be a member of the people he rules. [Collins, 48]

If Jesus is the source of our fruitfulness, then the Church – the people of God, the covenant community – is the structure by which we often receive that life, and can grow to be fruitful.

Collins explains this further:

“To be in the vine,” he writes, “[...] is to be [...] counted among that people whom Jesus represents [...]. When we become part of the church, we join a web of relationships with other members, all of whom are connected to Christ. The lives of the members are woven together by the invisible bond of the Holy Spirit. We all depend on one another. And, generally speaking, the life of Christ comes to us mediated through other Christians. To abide in Christ is to use our connection to other Christians as the vehicle by which Christ ministers life to us—and each of us is a vehicle of Christ’s life to others.” [Collins, 49]

The Church – with all its glories and all its glaring imperfections – is the vehicle (the structure) through which Jesus ordinarily ministers his life to us. And so if we want to receive that life, we must cling to the Church – we must embed ourselves in the network of relationships it represents, and we must allow the Holy Spirit to breathe life into us in that context, so that we may be fruitful.

Branches are not designed to “go it alone.” [Wright, 71]

So, if we want to bear fruit that glorifies God, first we must rely on the source of fruitfulness: Jesus Christ. Second, we must cling to the structure of fruitfulness: The Church of Christ.

### **EXPECTING THE SHEARS AIMED AT FRUITFULNESS:**

But third, we must expect the shears aimed at fruitfulness.

And the shears of the vinedresser come to us in this passage as both a warning and an encouragement.

Let’s first consider the warning.

In verse two Jesus says of his Father, the vinedresser: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.” In verse six he adds: “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

We should notice a few things here.

The first is the reason why a branch would not bear fruit was because it did not have a true life-giving connection to Jesus. Jesus is not telling us here to earn our salvation any more than a branch can earn a connection to the vine by producing fruit on its own. The foundational need is a living connection to Jesus.

But the second we should see here is that it is possible to be connected to the structure of fruitfulness without being connected to the source of fruitfulness. It is possible to physically be connected to the vine without being truly connected to the vine. It is possible to be a member of the covenant community without embracing Christ from the heart – to be part of the church without having saving faith.

The question to ask then is: Is that you?

Now, that's a tricky question to ask. Because often the people most worried about that are the least at risk. If you have a sensitive conscience that leads you to struggle with assurance, you're not the main person this question is for.

This question is much more for the person here who is least concerned with the question. It's for the person who is here, but just going through the motions. And not just going through the motions this morning because they're tired ... but going through the motions because going through the motions is the sum total of their relationship with God.

This question is for the person who is externally connected to the people of God, but if you really look at your life: at your actions, at what you most value, at what you want, at what you do – there is no real evidence that you are united with Christ. There is no fruit. No growth in love, or faith. This is not primarily about a vague feeling. It is about the fruit of faithfulness and love that comes from being united to Jesus. And it's not about perfect fruit. But it is about seeing some kind of fruit.

Undoubtedly there are people here this morning who are part of our congregation, but are not truly connected to the Lord. Maybe you've been with us for a little while. Maybe you've been with us your whole life. But there is no real fruit of the gospel in your life. Because you do not have a real and life-giving connection to Jesus.

If that is you, then our text has two things to say to you.

First, Jesus here tells you that unless something changes, you will be cut off, and cast away. Maybe it will happen in this life. Maybe circumstances will come up that cause you to walk away. Or maybe it will come in the next life. Maybe at the final judgement you will be exposed for who you are, and separated then.

Jesus says that those branches separated will be thrown away, will wither, and in the end will be thrown into the fire. This is Jesus's description of hell. This is what eternal separation from God is like. Vine branches either produce fruit that glorifies God because they are united with Christ the vine ... or they are cut off and thrown away into the fire. Those are the only two options for a vine branch. [Carson, 517; Augustine, *Tractate LXXXI.3*]

Which means that if you are a branch without real life in you, there is nothing more important than connecting with Christ. Your call, again, is not first to produce fruit – but to connect to Christ so that you can produce fruit. Turn to Jesus. Put your trust in him. And ask him to transform you and your life – to change your highest purpose from serving yourself to glorifying God.

This is what Jesus’s words have to say to those who are part of his people, but not truly united to him, and so not producing fruit in their lives.

But what about the branches that are producing fruit?

Well ... shockingly, Jesus tells us that the shears are coming for them as well – though with a different purpose and intention.

Jesus says in verse two that every branch that does bear fruit – every branch that does have a life-giving connection to Jesus leading to fruitfulness – every branch that does bear fruit, God will prune.

What does that mean?

Well, for one thing it means that the word of God itself prunes us.

We know this because of verse three. This is lost in translation to English, but the word for “pruned” in verse two and the word for “cleansed” in verse three actually have the same root in Greek. That’s why Jesus seems to go back and forth between talking about being pruned and being cleansed – in Greek, the transition would seem more natural. Jesus is saying that his disciples have already been “pruned” to some extent by his word. [Roberts; Carson, 515]

So one aspect of this pruning comes from the word of God.

But another aspect comes from our circumstances. And we see that in part because the word for “pruned” also shares its root with the word for “cut off.” [Carson, 515] The image used here is also one of outside circumstances that act upon the branch. And as suffering or persecution is often the means by which God leads false Christians to walk away from his people, those same sufferings and persecutions are also how God prunes true believers. [Roberts]

Pruning often comes by the difficult circumstances that the Lord brings into our life – it often comes through our trials, our losses, and our suffering.

And this is captured in the very imagery that Jesus uses here.

Pruning is the act of cutting back parts of the branches of a vine. I’ve mentioned shears, a bit anachronistically, but they are the pruning tool we are most familiar with. In the ancient world pruning was done by a range of methods. Sometimes a pruning hook was used to cut the branches. [Goor, 50] Other times twisting, ringing, pinching, or cutting were used to prune vines. [Goor, 55]

But why do this? Why do vinedressers cut back vines?

Grape-vine branches don't need human beings in order to survive. They will grow on their own. But on their own they will grow into a vast tangle and produce fruit that is a lot less useful for people. To produce good fruit though, the vine branches do need the attention of a vinedresser. Lots of attention. And one of the chief forms of that attention is pruning.

Left to itself the vine will focus its energy on all sorts of other things – on growing out in unproductive directions, in producing smaller, lower-quality fruit. But pruning concentrates the branch's attention on what is most important: the quality of the grapes it produces.

The goal of pruning is vigorous quality growth. And “the more severely you cut back a vine the more vigorously it grows.”

That goal of vigorous quality growth, one agricultural writer explains,

“is the aim, individual vine by individual vine, of all those people you see bundled up against the chill, moving slowly with shears through the winter vineyards. They're not just mindlessly clipping away [...] Single one [vinedresser] out and watch him (or her) for awhile. You may get a sense of the decisions he is making as he goes along. ‘On this vine we'll encourage more next year's growth,’ you see him mentally deciding, as he accomplishes that by cutting it back more, leaving a smaller total number of buds. ‘This one, with its heavy growth this year, we will let carry more buds’—thus increasing its productive potential the coming season. Many other considerations are quickly processed in his mind before his shears close on wood—the selection of canes to leave, this one rather than that one, and why; the placement of spurs and much more—more than can possibly be covered here. It takes much know-how—an incompetent or inattentive pruner can do real damage in a vineyard with wrong decisions. I have great respect for what goes on and has gone on out on those windswept slopes. Perhaps, as you observe it closely, you will, too.” [Rezelman]

Jesus tells us that that is a picture of how God uses his word in our lives. But it is also a picture of how God uses suffering, trials, and losses in our lives.

Think about what that means. The vinedresser cuts back healthy, living parts of the branch, in order to force the branch to grow in ways that it would not choose to grow if left to itself. That's how pruning works.

The vinedresser is not arbitrary. He is not haphazard. He brings deep wisdom to the vine. He takes great care. He is precise about where he cuts. He has his reasons, even if the vine would never understand them.

And in this process of cutting away healthy parts of the branch – this process of thwarting the branch's intention for how it grows – the branch actually becomes more itself – it becomes more what it was meant to be. It does more glorious works. It produces better fruit than it would have otherwise. It serves the vinedresser as it is called to and causes the vinedresser to rejoice more and more in the fruit it produces.

That is what a vinedresser does for a vine. And that, Jesus says, is what God does for you.

And that has a few implications.

For one thing, it shows us a new reason why God might bring suffering into our lives. Sure, some branches may be producing poor fruit, and so they are pruned. But some may be producing great fruit, and God is confident they could do even better with the right cuts. After all, Jesus says that God prunes *every* branch that produces fruit – “No fruit-bearing branch is exempt.” [Carson, 514]

And so if you are bearing fruit, you should expect pruning to come your way.

For another thing, this truth should affect what we expect from the Word of God. The word of God does many things. It assures us, it guides us, it comforts us. But it also prunes us. Jesus says that that is what it has done for the disciples in verse three.

One commentator writes of the disciples: “Jesus has spoken the word to them, calling them to take up their cross and follow him. They have had to submit to the pruner’s knife, cutting away other goals and ambitions. They have already borne fruit; they must now expect more pruning, so that they can bear more fruit.” [Wright, 70]

But third, and finally, the reality of how God uses pruning should change our understanding of suffering as a whole.

It should challenge our often-secular assumptions about suffering.

Our secular tendencies tell us that our greatest goals are our own successes, our own comfort, and our own happiness. And if that is true, then, as Keller puts it, “suffering cannot be a good chapter in your life story” It can only be “an interruption of it. [...] It can only keep you from the things you most want in life.” [Keller, 22023]

But if Jesus is right (and he is), then suffering might be an important means by which you achieve your highest purpose in life. Suffering is often a key means by which God makes us fulfill our chief end – by which he makes us into branches that bear the fruit of a faithful life that glorifies him. Suffering can therefore be an important chapter in our lives and in how we fulfill our highest calling. [Keller, 22-23]

## **CONCLUSION:**

And with that all said, let’s take a moment to talk about 2020 ... and let’s throw in 2021 while we’re at it. Because if there’s anything the past seven months has taught us, it’s that none of us knows what the future holds.

I’ve heard a lot of people speak of 2020 as a “wash” ... or as a “loss.” I’ve probably said it myself at times. But whether in our words or in our thoughts, it’s become common to think of this year, and at least some of the months ahead as a “pause” in “real life” – as a way of “losing ground” on the real focuses of life.

But what are the assumptions that lay beneath that outlook, and that feeling?

Isn't it true that that perspective assumes that what matters most in human life is your plans – your success, your comfort, your happiness? Doesn't that feeling assume a thoroughly secular perspective on the point of your life? And so ... if Jesus is right about the primary purpose of human life ... then isn't that common perspective on the past seven months rooted in unbelief?

If the chief end of human life is achieving happiness, comfort, and worldly success, then sure, this year is a wash. But if the chief end of human life is bearing fruit for God by obeying his commandments even when we don't like them, and loving other people even when they make us mad, then this year has been full of opportunities to do the greatest things you could possibly do.

If the greatest good for our life is to grow in the ways *you want* to grow, then this year has been a frustrating waste of time, full of lost opportunities. But if God is a vinedresser, who prunes away the ways we may have chosen to grow in order to force us to grow in the ways he wants us to grow, then it's possible that in God's eyes this may have been one of the most formative years for you in a long time.

God is at work. He is clipping us back. It's not pleasant. It can feel painful. We have sent out shoots to go in a certain direction and he has snapped, or cut, or twisted them off. He has forced us to focus our energy in directions we didn't plan to, and frankly didn't want to.

But he hasn't done it out of spite. He hasn't done it out of carelessness or inattention. He has done it to make you more fruitful. He has done it to make you more dependent on Christ, the vine. He has done it to focus what you have received from him on what he knows is most important.

Have you cooperated or have you resisted him? Have you even had eyes to see the fact that he is at work?

And if you haven't, then there are three things you need to do.

One is look back and consider how God has been at work. How has God been growing you in the past seven months? What has his pruning cut away? And what buds have maybe begun to sprout up that ... if you're honest, if life had gone the way that you wanted it to, then those buds never would have sprouted.

Now, if you don't see any buds yet, don't despair. Vines are often pruned in winter. The buds don't come until much later. Delays are normal. Have trust that God is at work.

But when you do see buds, turn to God, and thank him. Thank him for that. And realize that if it were up to you, those buds probably never would have grown there.

If you are a branch that is united to the vine, then God has been at work in you – whether you see it now or not. He promises that that it is the case.

So, the first thing we need to do is to look backwards.

The second thing is to look to Christ.

He is the source of our life. He is the source of what we need to survive and what we need to bear fruit. He also is the one who offers us comfort from the trauma that comes with pruning. Don't try to bear fruit on your own. Don't try to recover from the pruning on your own. Do everything in reliance on him. For apart from him you can do nothing.

Look back. Look to Christ. And third and finally, look forward. We don't know what the future holds. But one way or another, more pruning will come into each of our lives. Jesus tells us that in this passage.

And when it does, how will you receive it? How will you view it? What will you hope comes from it? How will you relate to God in the midst of it? What will you view as your primary purpose as you endure it?

Jesus here calls you to remember that he is the vine, we are the branches, and God the Father is the vinedresser. Your primary purpose is to bear fruit that brings glory to God. As the Father prunes your life to that end, and the Son supports you and gives you life to that end, rely fully on Christ, cling to his people, and long to produce the fruit of love, faithfulness, and righteousness that glorifies our magnificent God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. Tractates LXXX-LXXXVII. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series, Volume 7.

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