

**“Bearing Much Fruit”
Sermon for Sunday, May 6, 2018**

Sometimes we don't know that the words another is speaking will be their last words to us. Jesus and the disciples are outside Jerusalem and Jesus is teaching them for the last time. When he finishes speaking he will be arrested and the next day crucified. Our scripture reading for this morning is from what would come to be known as his “Farewell Discourse”.

SCRIPTURE: John 15:9-17 “The Word of God for the people of God...”

This morning I brought an object lesson. [bring out the plant].

This plant was a gift from the moving company, delivered a few days after our arrival last summer. I cringed a bit when it arrived because any plant sent my way tends to have received a death sentence! But somehow these little guys have not only survived... but thrived! Jesus said: *“I appointed you to go and bear fruit!”* and while my little plant here is not an apple tree to a cherry tree, it has its own kind of fruit.

Anything that is living has to be growing. If it is not growing, it is dying.
That’s true of plants and it’s true of disciples and churches.

- Sometimes the plant is growing below the surface as its root system develops and flourishes. Healthy plants need a strong foundation that draws in the water and connects with the nutrients needed for growth and health. The same is true for us as disciples—we must stay connected with what gives us life and nourishes us. Jesus says: *“I am the vine and you are the branches... just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”* (John 15:4-5)
When we fail to stay close to Christ, we become dry and unhealthy. We are disconnected from the living water. So how do we maintain a healthy spiritual root system? We stay connected to the vine of Christ through prayer, Bible reading and study, Sabbath and meditation, through worship and the supportive community of brothers and sisters.
- On the other hand, it can't be just about what is happening below the surface. A healthy plant is developing above the surface and bears fruit. Sometimes disciples and even churches can get “stuck” on the “below the ground” work. All their time and energy are spent on their own relationship with Christ, but there is no fruit—like a plant that is root bound.

Faithful disciples of Jesus are doing both--growing a strong foundation that is rooted in our Lord Jesus Christ AND bearing fruit in the world around them.

“I appointed you to go and bear fruit!”

And what is the fruit that we are called to bear?

"To love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12-13)

"To go and make disciples." (Matthew 28:19)

The fruit that we are called to "bear" is the making of disciples—and we do that by loving others as we have been loved by Christ. He gave his life that we might have life—and have it abundantly.

Not all churches will bear the same kind of fruit in the same way.

Not all of us will bear the same kind of fruit in the same way.

Some of you may be giant sequoias, others beautiful rose bushes and some hardy pansies—no one better or more beautiful than the other.

That's what our "Summer of Serving: 2000 Acts of Love" is all about!

Each of us bearing fruit using our gifts in our area of influence. Need an idea? I read this week...

Along with a research firm, Cigna surveyed 20,000 adults aged 18 or older to assess the state of loneliness... just under half of respondents reported sometimes or always feeling alone or left out... Young people [Gen Xers and Millennials in particular] reported high rates of loneliness, with rates decreasing with age... Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, making it even more dangerous than obesity.¹"

So maybe this week we focus on loneliness in our acts of love... as a way of "bearing fruit". Visiting in homes, apartments, assisted living... making phone calls or sending cards. Don't be afraid to engage someone you do not know. And if loneliness is greatest with our youth and young adults, talk to Youth Director Kim Truesdell or our Director of Congregational Life and Nurture and see how you can help support a young person!

[End... the Lord's Supper is one of many opportunities to stay connected to the vine.]

¹ Douglas Nemecek, MD, chief medical officer for behavioral health at Cigna.