

The 5th Sunday in Lent (Year C)

Apr 3, 2022

Bearing Fruit

The Reverend Amanda A. Akes-Cardwell

Appointed Readings:

N/A

Psalms 92:12-15

Revelation 22:1-2

John 15:1-5,16-17

I understand that this Lent you have been looking to trees as guides of spiritual growth. As you've moved through your lenten journey, you've explored ways in which roots, soil, trunks, and branches offer us guidance on our Christian journey. And this week, I get to bring your lenten sermon series to its conclusion as we explore the theme of fruit and fruitfulness.

In our gospel text we hear Jesus speak to his disciples about fruit. He very explicitly tells his followers that it is his expectation that they will bear fruit. And not *just* fruit, but fruit that will last. The followers who do bear this kind of fruit will have their branches pruned so that they can bear more fruit. The followers who do not produce fruit, will be removed. Moral of the story? Bear fruit! But what does that mean? What kind of fruit is Jesus talking about here? What does he want his followers to do, exactly?

For the answer, we need look no further than the last verse of the gospel text - "I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another" (vs. 17). The fruit that Jesus' followers produce should be fruits of love. The same kind of self-giving, God-revealing, life-changing love that Jesus' life produced. The same love that Jesus showed his followers day in and day out. That is the fruit that Jesus expects his friends and followers to bear. That is the fruit that Jesus expects us to bear.

To love like Jesus and to bear fruits of love in his name, may seem like big tasks. But here's the thing to remember, Jesus doesn't just tell us to bear fruit and then leave us on our own to be productive. No. He promises to be with us.

Let's turn to the example of trees. In order to produce fruit, most trees must be in direct sunlight. There are a few shade-dwelling bushes and trees that can produce fruit, but the vast majority of trees must receive direct sunlight in order to be fruitful. So it is with us. We must live directly in the SONlight - the light of Christ. In order to bear fruits of love that are lasting, we ourselves, need to be in relationship with the One who sustains our life. When we intentionally tend to our relationship with Jesus, when we make him a priority, when we live in

direct relationship with Christ - through prayer, scripture reading, worship - it is then that we have the best chance of bearing fruits of love in our world.

For some fruit bearing trees however, dwelling in the sunlight is not enough to enable them to produce the best fruit. In these cases, fruit bearing trees need a little help. That is where grafting comes into play. Have you heard of this? It was a new concept to me. Here's how it works: if you ate a Macintosh apple and planted the seed, the tree it grew would produce apples that looked and tasted nothing like Macintoshes. So, instead of planting seeds, growers attach a cutting from a desirable tree onto an existing branch or sapling, called the "rootstock," so that the grafted bit produces apples genetically identical to those on the tree it was cut from. Sometimes there are multiple types of apples on the different branches, all grafted onto one rootstock tree.

So it is with us. Jesus is the rootstock onto which we are grafted. His steadfastness enables our grafted branches to produce pleasing, desirable fruit. We are able to bear good fruit because we are grafted onto the best rootstock. We are grounded in something larger than ourselves. Something greater, something stronger. As St. Paul says,

“we who are many are one.” Our many grafted branches are able to produce varied and good fruits because we have a strong foundation in Christ, who is our rootstock.

When we have Jesus as both our grounding rootstock and our sustaining sun, there is no doubt we will produce good fruit. How could we do anything but bear lasting fruits of love? And like those grafted trees onto which many branches bear different varieties of fruit, our fruits of love can and will be expressed in varied ways.

I recently read about something called “Project TGIF.” You may be familiar with the acronym TGIF meaning “thank God it’s Friday.” Well in this case TGIF stands for “turn grease into fuel.” This Project Turn Grease Into Fuel, or TGIF, was the brainchild of Cassandra Lin, a 5th grader from Rhode Island.

Lin learned that used cooking oil could be converted into cheap, clean-burning biodiesel and that it could then be used to heat homes and other establishments. Upon discovering this, Lin organized some of her friends. They went to local restaurants and asked the establishments to recycle their grease so that it could be shared with charities that identified families who needed heating assistance.

Since its inception, Lin's outfit has helped offset more than 2 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions by promoting the use of biodiesel. Additionally, Lin and her team drafted a bill that required all businesses in Rhode Island to recycle their waste cooking oil and worked with local legislators to get it approved. State lawmakers passed the Used Cooking Oil Recycling Act and it went into effect six months later, expanding Project TGIF's efforts into neighboring communities.

Lin produced fruit. Because she cared about her neighbor and her environment, she made a change in and a difference for her community. This is a good fruit of love. And it is lasting. Her team ensured that the changes they made became lasting through legislative action. This fruit came about by the efforts of one 5th grader and her friends. If she can do it, so can we.

Jesus calls us, as his followers, to do as Cassandra Lin did. He calls us to know our community and to learn the needs of our context. He calls us to then open our hearts and minds in order to make an impact. Simply put, he calls us to produce fruits of love that are lasting. Nowhere in the Gospel does he tell us exactly what the fruit should look like. He leaves it to our creative, adaptive, ingenuitive spirits to

determine how love should be lived out in our contexts. He trusts us to carry out his mission of love in our world.

So... how will you respond? What fruits of love will you produce as individuals? What fruits of love will you produce as a community, as Christ Church Wayside and La Plata? I know you are part of the diocesan Tending Our Soil initiative. As such, you are learning about yourself and your community. You're taking stock so that you can better love your neighbor and produce lasting fruit in Jesus' name. I hope that as you find yourself grounded more and more in the rootstock of Christ, and in his sunlight, that you will lean into your call to bear fruit. I'm excited to discover what that fruit will look like. I know it will come. How could it not? God bless you on your journey. May your fruit be lasting and may it be a blessing to you and to others. Amen.