

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

**Title: Remain In Me**

**Lesson: John 15:1-8 NRSV**

*15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just 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. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

My family and I came back from California last Saturday night. During the vacation, we rested well and spent time with Esther’s relatives. When her aunt hold Evan, he cried loudly because of being shy of new face, and we ate Korean food one by one that we wrote down in our wish Korean food list we made in Wisconsin because Southern California has the largest Korean immigrant community in the states. We expected sunny weather in California, but it was windy and cool weather. By the way, yesterday’s weather was very nice so we went to Clear Lake park to enjoy the awesome weather and the beautiful nature.

The Bible likens a blessed family to a tree that bears fruit. Vine is often described as the peace of family. For example, Psalm 128:3 (NRSV) tells that “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table”. Vines have good fertility. Grapefruit also means abundance. Genesis tells us that Noah was the first man to grow grapes.

According to today’s gospel reading, Jesus introduces himself as a vine: “I am the true vine” (1) He is the vine, but the true vine.

In the Old Testament, the vine symbolizes the people of Israel. But mostly vine metaphors have been used negatively. The reason is that the people of Israel were disobedient to God’s Word. The prophet Isaiah sighs in the parable of the vineyard saying “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” (Isa5:4, NRSV) The prophet Jeremiah also lamented the disobedience of the Israelites

saying, “Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?” (Jer2:21, NRSV)

Likewise, the people of Israel are often referred to in the Bible as vine trees, but their fruit and vine branches were evil and corrupt. This is why Jesus said that “I am the true vine.” Jesus is the true vine, not false. He introduced himself as the true vine because he is the one who will realize the joy of a blessed vine. He spoke of himself as a man who will fulfill the calling and hope God gave Israel.

What’s important here is that Jesus is not just a vine, but the true vine. Jesus promised to restore the true community of each family through the true vine.

One of the features of a vine is its vigorous fertility. So the important thing that a vine-breeder does is pruning. They have to prune the vine thoroughly to make it grow well. They also remove any of branches that don’t produce fruit, and trim any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce.

Jesus said to his people: “Remain in me, and I will remain in you.” (4) The lives of those who remain in Christ are blessed. Just as the goal of all branches is to bear fruit, those who remain in Jesus are guaranteed to bear abundant fruit.

There are no vine branches in the world that can leave and bear fruit on its own. Jewish descent cannot be guaranteed to be saved by God. The fruit of the vine is not all true. The social position and status or power or money cannot guarantee God’s salvation. The most important thing is whether life is united with Jesus Christ or not. Jesus tells that “I am the vine; you are the branches.” (5) He explains the new life, the new faith, and the new salvation through the parable of the vine and branches. He encourages us to remain in him just as he did. Inviting the Holy Spirit to our hearts every day and the life that we remain in him and he remain in us are like the branches that receive nutriment from the true vine. This is the key to live an abundant life.

The condition of having abundant fruit in life is remaining in Christ. “If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit.” (5) When we invite the Holy Spirit and share God’s love with our neighbors in our lives, the Holy Spirit touches the minds and hearts of those who do not know or don’t believe in God. In our lives, in Christians’ lives, in disciples’ lives, the most important thing is remaining in Christ every day just like the true vine and branches that bear much fruit.

What is the life remaining in Christ? It's a life to pray to God every day and act God's love in life. Prayers in the morning or before going to bed connect our lives to Christ. Reading the Bible and meditating on the words every day give us new energy to live in Christ. Living in Christ means that we remain in him. It is to enjoy the peace of God in the strong relationship with God. In order to bear the abundant fruit of Christ in our lives, we must always live in Jesus.

The scripture reading we read today is an example of what life remains in Jesus and what life bears fruit. Philip was going to the wilderness following the angel's words. In the meantime, he met an Ethiopian. The man was reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah. At the time, the Holy Spirit said to Philip: "Approach this carriage and stay with it." He did and asked the Ethiopian. "Do you understand what you are reading?" But the man didn't understand the meaning. So, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him.

The evangelism class I have taken for 4 months finally ended in the past Tuesday. And I submitted my final paper on Friday, and it was all over. While studying evangelism, I realized that there are a lot of people who we should share the love of God. There may be more people who need God's love and help around us than we thought.

The Thrift sale was held at Clear Lake Church from the past Thursday to Friday. I know that not only our church members but also our neighbors visited the church. To convey gospel to others means more than just say we believe in Jesus. We are the people who deliver Christ to our neighbors by practicing the love of Christ in our lives. I pray in the name of the Lord that our WRP will always remain in Christ, dwell in Christ, and bear much fruit in the true vine. Amen.