

Date: 07/15/2012

Text: John 15:1-16

Title: I am the Vine 真葡萄樹

Theme: Since Christ has already connected us to him, His followers are to manifest this reality in life.

Introductions:

Many people list their accomplishments or resume in FB. The other day someone showed me one with a listing of the schools attended, every article that was written, every work place he'd been to, talks or sermons given. Another person would list all the schools he had taught, rewards received and scientific papers written. Then I started dreaming, maybe I should set up a FB account, listing all the places I have been to preach, schools I have attended, (but there aren't that many), how about every sermon I have preached? But wait, is that what I want others to know me by?

By the way, how will we list this church, HCC in FB? What do we want others to know us by? Some churches are known for their effectiveness in reaching out to the non-believers. One well known church in Ca, most recently was known as the church that in one year lost a total of 250,000 lbs among its members. What if we at HCC lose 250,000 lbs by next July? We may vanish from this planet. Now, what do you wish to be known by?

This is what Jesus was talking about in the passage we read. The disciples had nothing to brag about. They consisted of political zealots, fishermen and one tax collector. They had very little education but only known as Jesus' disciples. Not much to list in their FB. They knew that Jesus, whom they had followed for 3 years, would be leaving them soon, then what? Such a lack of identity can be quite unsettling.

This morning we want to explore what Jesus had to say to his disciples and that includes each one of us here. What does he want us to be known by?

SLIDE 1 AND 2 This is the last (for the English congregation at HCC) of Jesus' I AM statements: "I am the true vine." This is also the only statement that includes an extension phrase: 'and my father is the vinedresser'.

Before we go into this text, we need to take a closer look at the word "if". You probably have already noticed that it has repeatedly appeared in verses 6,7,10. We also see the words; 'in me' occurring repeatedly both here and in chapter 14. This 'in me' is a covenant word, conveying the secure relationship the believers have with Jesus. We are his children, he is our shepherd and God; nothing can change this. It is with this understanding that we are to look at the 'if's' in chapter 15. If its taken as a condition, meaning if you do this, you are in me, if not, you will be cut off; it can create great confusion. Therefore in our study of chapter 15, 'if' is taken to be descriptive. When/since you are in me, this is unconditional and a statement of an existing condition. Now, let's go into this passage.

I. Jesus is the Vine that replaced the Israelites. 1-

In the OT, the vine is used as a reference to the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. Psalm 80 has the most vivid description of this analogy. Vs. 8-11, "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. 11 It sent out its branches to the sea

and its shoots to the River.” This is a description of the Jewish nation at its zenith. God took them out of Egypt and gave them land and their influence reached out to the far end of the world. They were like a vine.

Then in vs. 12-14, “Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? 13 The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. 14 Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine...” This is a description of what happened after they repeatedly disobeyed God. They did not keep their part of the covenant with God. They were deserted and destroyed by other nations.

Now, Jesus came and proclaimed he is the True Vine. He had replaced the nation of Israel and became the true Vine. The heavenly father is the pruner and he had already removed the dead branches, the people of Israelites. Then what?

II. The believers are branches of this Vine. 1-5

Who are the branches? In vs. 3,4,5,7,9, we read words like ‘already you are clean because of the word...I am the vine and you are the branches.....Abide in me, and I in you.... Abide in me, my words abide in you,..... abide in my love.’” Jesus was speaking to the disciples/followers that they are the branches on this new vine. It is a life to life connection. It is not something you put on and snap off like Lego. As branches are connected to the vine, so the disciples are also connected to Jesus. They are in Jesus and Jesus in them. This is a truth we are to embrace in our hearts. When we place our faith in Christ, we are being connected to him. Nothing can cause us to be cut off from Christ. This is the security we are to have.

No failures or weaknesses on our part can separate us from Christ. Don't let anyone tell you that if you don't read the Bible more or pray more, or witness more, or do more good works, then you will be cut off from the Lord. No, nothing can separate us. This is both the wonder and mystery of our faith. When someone who is truly connected to the vine sometime in their life, their relationship with the Lord is secured. Even though we may have failed miserably, our lord will not say, 'since you have behaved badly, I am going to cut you off from my life, and then when you turn back, I'll connect you again.' It doesn't work that way. When we sin, when we disobey him, the father, the vine dresser will trim a little here and that. Sometimes the trimming can be very painful, but the purpose of that trimming is for the branch to bear fruit. Trimming is like opening up of some arteries so the blood can flow freely from the heart to other parts of the body. Trimming of the branch is to ensure life from the tree can flow more freely into the branch.

On rare occasions, a US or Chinese citizenship can be revoked, but not so for the citizens of Heaven. Jesus had said that no one could snatch us from His hands. This is the doctrine of eternal security.

III. Believers are to manifest the reality of being connected to Jesus. 7-10

Understanding our secure position and relationship with the Lord, then how are we to be known by? Or how will this relationship be expressed in life? We have noticed these words "I am in you, my words in you, my love in you.." It is like saying, when I am in you, you are in my word, you are in my love." And then vs.8, "8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." These verses tell us

that when we are in Christ, there will be obedience, love and fruits. They go hand in hand, cannot be separated. Let's take a closer look at them.

1. Obedience to Jesus' words. Vs.7, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." When you are in me, my word is also in you. This means that having been connected with Jesus, we are to read and be obedient to his word. Obedience to God's word is a dominant theme in the scriptures. From Genesis to Revelation, it is about being obedient to God's instructions. Obedience to God is a given. Its like if you are a living person, then you will breathe. If you are connected to Jesus, you will be obedient to his words. With this we can say, if there is no evidence of obedience to the scriptures, then we will ask if the person is truly connected to Jesus in the first place. However, we are to be cautious to pass judgment on anyone. Only God knows and he is the final judge. What happens when we are obedient to him? We'll pray. We also notice that two things will happen as we pray.

First, our prayers will be answered. When we read, obey his word, and pray according to his desire, our prayers will be answered. It is almost like a blank check. Whatever we pray, it will be answered. If there is something we having been praying about for a long time and yet it was not granted, we may pause and ask, is this request really compatible to God's word or is it my selfish desire?

Secondly, when we pray we will bear fruits. In the scriptures, especially in Paul's letters, he constantly reminded his readers to pray for others, to pray for the manifestation of the fruits of the spirit. So when we pray like this, our prayers will be granted, and there will be evidence of fruits in our lives.

It is also important to take note the result of answered prayers. That our father in heaven is glorified. When others see the fruit of the spirit in us, when they see Christ's likeness in us, they will say good things about God. This is the meaning of God being glorified.

2. Love. When we are in Christ, when we are connected to him, we are obedient to his word. Not only this, vs.9 also tells us, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." We are to abide in Christ, in his word, now in his love. In vs. 12 we are given a very specific instruction about this love. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." We are to love one another as the heavenly father have loved us. When we are connected with Christ, we are obedient to his words and this means we are to love one another. We don't have much problem loving those we like, but how about some of those irregular people in our lives? There are always some that can really drive us up the wall, right? Such as the friend (as least he/she considers you as one) who asks you every Friday what will you be doing this weekend? I think we all have one or two individuals in our mind that we have said, "No, don't tell me to love this person." But the command is quite clear, simple and no cutting corners. "Love one another as I have loved you."

To make sure we understand what this love is all about, he also tells us in vs.13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends." This is sacrificial love. Jesus also gave us another example: his relationship with the disciples are now friends. Love means we are willing to sacrifice our time, our finance, our energy, our daily schedule for the good of the other person. This includes visiting the sick, the house-bound and the prisoners; spending time listening to the lonely and depressed

friends. Helping financially and physically the victims of abuse, oppression and all kinds of violence. Certainly Jesus is hinting at what will happen to him. He loved us to the end, even dying on the cross. He is the model par excellence of love.

3. Bearing Fruits. In vs.16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” We are told that he has chosen us to be connected to him, and he has also sent us to bear fruits. In the context of the NT, there are several aspects of this fruit. It is a reference to the fruit of the Holy Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self control. In vs.16, fruit that will last refers to bringing others to Jesus; that they too, will be connected to him.

I am constantly reminded of how one of our dear sister’s life testimony. Even in her ill health, she is unwaveringly eager to share Jesus with others. And as a result in recent years, many have come to know Christ, being connected to him.

Conclusion:

A Beijing Univ. graduate posted this: “after graduation, I got a job that paid about US 1400 a month. Not bad, but not the best salary. Because of this, my father had called repeatedly to harass me, expressing his disappointment in me and how he had lost face before the relatives. Anyone had similar experience?” This post solicited countless responses. Often we want ourselves or our children to be known for what school they go to, what job or salary they are making. We may also want to be known by all the schools we have been to, the degrees, the articles we have written or with our names in it.

You know, Jesus is also interested in seeing how his disciples are known for. He wants us to be known not for our degrees, schools, or even accomplishments, but instead, for our obedience to him, our love for one another, our fruits of character, and fruits of bringing others to Him.