

Jesus said, "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. "

Our gospel reading this morning does not beat around the bush. It gets right to the point, and that point is that Christ-centered Christians find power to live for God and to do good works far greater than they might expect. Why? It is because when Christians live this way, they are not living and working alone. The Holy Spirit stands with them, and works through them to do those things that not only are pleasing to God, but are essential for the good of God's creation. When Christians strive to abide in Christ and are prayerful, the Holy Spirit blesses their work and their works bear much fruit. The result is that great good is done and our world is better for it.

The way that God's realizes his hope for his world is through the efforts of those of us who hear the words of this gospel passage and take them seriously. The words of Scripture are these: "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." "Ask for whatever you wish," Jesus said. "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you." It will be done because God is glorified when Christians bear the fruit of the vine of Christ. In another place, Scripture tells us to ask and it will be given. Seek, Scripture says, and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. The Holy Spirit does not deny the person who tries to be the Lord's servant.

Scripture also tells us that God created us in his own image. What does that mean? I think that we come close to understanding it if we say that we are created in his image because he gave us the capability of truly loving, of genuinely caring for the well being of another. By loving this way we share a common attribute with God because God is love, and he loves us so much that he came into this world to live physically among us and, in the end, to give his life for us, through the self-offering of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, it seems to me, we are like God, that is, we are in the image of God, in love and in love alone.

Saint Paul once said that love is eternal. Of course it is, because God is love, and it is through love that God's work is done in this world. Paul said that love is patient, kind and forgiving. He said that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. And, if you think about it, it is precisely when we experience this type of love and acceptance of ourselves by others that we experience true liberation and the ability to be truly free and at peace. So, we are called, in Christ, to love this way in return. When we love this way, then our actions are loving actions and the work of God is done, by us, through Christ.

Never will we do this in any way that approaches perfection. In our humanity, our patience wears too thin. We get too frustrated and in the frustration anger gets in our way. But, the reality is that anger takes us away from God. Anger lets us become not the

handmaid of the Lord, not the servant of the lord, but rather the servant of the devil. And so we try to abide in Christ, to be the branches of his vine. Because we know that when we are the branches of the vine of Christ, we do bear good fruit and our lives are meaningful. And, when we do not abide in Christ we are like the vine which withers and dies, the vine that the vine dresser gathers up and tosses into the fire. *Amen.*