

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

April 28, 2024

First Reading: Acts 8: 26-40

Responsive Reading: Psalm 22: 25-31

Epistle Reading: 1 John 4: 7-21

Gospel Reading: John 4: 1-8

Sermon:

My Father is Glorified that You Bear Much Fruit

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: The only way to get an “A” in the course is show the teacher that you have learned what He taught.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”.

If you want to start a vineyard you probably don’t want to plant apple trees. Then again if you work for Motts and want to make applesauce Concord grapes might not be the plant of choice.

This is so obvious that it probably sounds downright stupid but the point I am driving at is just what kind of fruit is Jesus talking about?

Galatians 5 says, " ...be guided by the spirit...and the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." But I believe Jesus is being more specific. In our reading from 1st John 4 [specifically] verse 16, John says, "GOD IS LOVE, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." Walla! If God is love, then the fruit of His tree is LOVE. Love, plain and simple. That is all there is to it.

This may well be the simplest, seemingly impossible, instruction that Jesus ever gave us. Two weeks ago, we read in 1st John 3: 7, "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He [God} is righteous." OK, that sounds easy enough. If we "try" to be righteous we are righteous. Beautiful! We can do that.

OK, here is the rub. If God is love and the fruit of God is love and we are supposed to bear the fruit of God, which is love, that means that we, mere humans, are supposed to bear God because He is love. How can we do that? God and sin are totally incompatible. The only man that was without sin was Jesus Christ Himself. OK, OK, OK, OK! Hold it! Stop already. This is

getting impossible, and God never expects us to achieve the impossible. Let's get back to basics.

What is the great commandment? The great and the first commandment is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and the strength, and the second is like unto it. Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Hate the sin but love the sinner. Do not judge others, judge the actions of others so that you do not do likewise but don't judge others, just love them.

Our Psalmist knew how to love God. "My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him, the poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the Lord. And all the families of the nations Shall worship before you. For the Kingdom is the Lord's And he rules over the nations."

Going back to 1st John, in verse 16 he says, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him....We love Him because He first loved us." God did not love us because we were perfect or even because we were loyal to Him. Heck no, God loved us and died for us as we were killing Him.

God does not expect us to be perfect. God knows our limitations. God is willing to work within our limitations. If you are a race car driver and you have the fastest, best handling, most aerodynamic car on the track you will not get very far if you do not have any fuel in the tank. God wants to fuel us up, and what's more, He wants to teach us His winning ways. God's love is the fuel that powers the car. God's love is the winning strategy that will take us over the finish line, and love is the prize that will enrich everyone that experiences it and makes it their own.

The teacher wants us all to be able to show that we were listening and know that, " by this they will know that you are Christians, that you love one another and that you the branches are one with the vine. We are one with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are the fruit, let the fruit glorify the Vine!

Hallelujah and Amen!

[Type here]