

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

First of all, please let me express my sincere apologies for not including a sermon with the last few weekly mailings. I got the luck of the draw and came down with the Covid virus which itself led to a little problem with pneumonia which really set me back the last few weeks. I am happy to say I am doing much better. I also thank everyone for the calls, texts, cards, etc. during my illness. I cannot adequately express how helpful they were! They were also an excellent illustration of how we are all connected together and share a common life together as Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, the shoots off that vine.

Jesus says it right here,

**I am the vine; you are the branches. John 15:5**

This is really, really, really good news for us that will inspire and empower us every day. Have any of you had your lawn service out to treat your lawn yet? I know many people have. The service involves a two-pronged approach to a nice lawn. First is the lawn food that helps the grass green up. The other part is the herbicides that kill the weeds. As pretty as dandelions are in the spring when in bloom, they aren't very pretty after the blooms are done. The broad-leaf plants spread to every corner of the lawn and replace the grass with their gnarly, jagged-edged leaves. In my experience, the most resilient, stubborn, difficult to eradicate weeds are the ivy types that have underground runners that connect each weed with the others. These are a type of vine. They are among the hardest to get rid of. However, the truth about these vines is a help to us because Jesus says he is the vine. As far as his saving and healing nature is concerned, Jesus compares himself to the most prolific and persistent types of species in the plant world – vines. Jesus is not like some wimpy flower that wilts as soon as it gets a little dry. Jesus is not as much like a tree, either, that stands tall but stands alone. He is the vine - voracious, tenacious, spreading, and highly productive.

Let me emphasize something else here, perhaps over-emphasize to make the point. Jesus does not say that he is the vine and we can be the branches. He does not say he is the vine and we should be the branches, ought to be branches, must be branches, have to be branches, need to get around to being the branches or any other such thing. Jesus simply says, "I am the vine; you ARE the branches." This is the good news and the gospel of Jesus' saving work on our behalf. The necessary work that needed to be done to make us part of God's vine has already been completed. It is a done deal. It is forever accomplished in the life, death, resurrection, and rule of Jesus Christ. We can let our hearts rest in the peace of knowing this has all already been accomplished for us and there is absolutely nothing that can separate us again from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

I know that sometimes we do not feel like we are a part of Jesus as one of his branches or anything else. Life has countless challenges it throws at us and we are not always as strong as

we might be. When temptations, testing, trials, and tribulations come, its true that sometimes we take a walk on the dark side and let our emotions take us in the wrong direction of hatred, anxiety, doubt, fear, selfishness, and all the rest. This is the normal life of a believer. We saw it in the lives of Jesus' disciples. We see it in our own lives. No matter! Jesus teaches us a profound, life-changing truth in verse three of our text. This is actually one of my all-time personal favorite passages from all of scripture. Jesus says,

**Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. John 15:3**

Can you feel what Jesus is saying? Do you get the difference this truth makes for our lives? We are clean, as Jesus says, we belong to him, we are his holy set-apart for God people, and in this context we are the branches not because of our right thinking, spiritual intentions, or righteous life. We are all these and more because of the word Jesus speaks to us in power. Period.

We are people of faith. What do we believe in? This is what we believe in. With the very word of God Jesus cleanses us, gives us the new birth of the Spirit, and grafts us into himself, the vine, and keeps us there. Jesus' cleansing word has been spoken to us in our baptism. It has been spoken to us every time we gather for worship. It is spoken to us every time we open the scriptures and receive the words of Jesus there. We are already clean because of the word that Jesus has spoken to us.

What a gift and blessing! We begin, live in, and end each day in this truth of God's power working in our lives. It does not depend on our faithfulness. It rests on the faithfulness of the resurrected Jesus. It's power is not sourced in our ability, but in the gracious and compassionate power of the Lord. The effectiveness of our cleansing and salvation is complete because everything God does is completely perfect in every way.

Thanks be to God for Jesus being the saving vine! Thanks be to God for cleansing us with his word and forever connecting us to Jesus as permanent branches stemming from the vine. We greet every joy and gladness knowing that they come from the Lord of all. We embrace every trouble, pain, and sorrow in the truth that, no matter what, Jesus is the vine and we are the branches now and forever. Amen.