

5 Sunday Easter B 2018

April 29

Frazeo/Callaway

Until this week I have had the wrong impression of what it means to prune a vine. I used to think that to prune was to take off a stray branch. Like getting a hair cut before you need one. *Just take a little off the top.* Remove the dead leaves and branches and pretty-up the rest. Oh no. this is not pruning, or so I have learned.

I watched some video on pruning a grape vine. It is major surgery! According to the University of Nebraska Extension, to prune a vine is to remove 80-90% of last year's growth. By the time the vine is pruned, it looks like there are no branches left. Lets return to the parable for a moment:

Jesus paints a picture:

- The father is the vine grower
- Jesus is the vine
- We are the branches

The Father..."takes away every branch that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit."

In order to make us more fruitful, the Father needs to cut away 80-90% of us. Think about how radical this is. If you have 30 pair of shoes you would be left with 3. If you have 40 shirts you would be left with 4. If you have a 2200 square foot house you would be left with 220 square feet—one room. The purpose of this pruning is not to make us miserable or to cause us to suffer. The Father prunes the branches so that we can be more fruitful!

Last week ABC news ran a story about a married couple, Chris and Maria, and their four children. Maria felt like a single mom. Why? Because Chris spent several hours a day or more playing video games in the basement while she took care of the children. On the weekends from the time he woke up until the time he went to bed he was in the basement playing video games. Chris would skip holiday gatherings, family events and precious parenting moments. Christ had six gaming consoles and 150 carefully organized games.

Do you think Chris needed a little trim? To reduce his games from 150 to 147? Diagnosed as an addict, he needed to go from 150 to none. That is a radical pruning. Why? So that he could be fruitful! His wife and children needed him to be present and active in their lives. They needed a husband and a daddy. What does fruitfulness mean for you?

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul teaches us that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Jesus himself condensed the Christian life into two things: love God and love your neighbor. On January 9, Pope Francis talked about Christian love. He said that it is not like soap opera love, it is not selfish romanticism, it is not like ecstasy in one's heart of a nice feeling. Christian fruitfulness is expressed in a love that is concrete...like feeding the hungry or visiting the sick. The first criterion of love is to love with deeds not with words. The second criterion of Christian love is that to give is more important than to receive.

The Father prunes the branches so that the vine will produce more fruit. Love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, loving deeds and giving of self—is there anything that stands in the way of your fruitfulness? Is there anything that gets in the way of your vocation and living it well? Lop it off! Get rid of it. Let the Father's desire for your fruitfulness be realized.

When watching the video it was amazing to see the before and after images of the vine. Before the pruning you could see the branches...after you could see the trunk and the arms. When we trim more and more of the world and its excess from our lives, what is exposed is Jesus.

Let's not mess around with half-measures and half-hearted reform. If there is something in your life that is causing you to sin or preventing you from fruitfulness, get rid of it. Let the Father prune you.

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”