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Passage: John 15:1-8
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We're going through a little series on Settling In:

Settling into a new school year...

Settling into a new season...

A new pastor...

Last week we looked at Psalm 78.

We talked about remembering our shared story.

How it's good to have an anchor as we start another busy season.

And that anchor is our story as God's redeemed people.

And we talked about how God remembers us.

So last week was a look at the past, per se.

Next week we'll look at the future.

I'll be preaching from the book of Revelation, so be ready for that.

And this week we're looking at the...present.

We're going to be talking about *Abiding* or *Remaining* in Christ.

Reading that well-loved passage about the vine and the branches.

Turn with me to John 15.

Page 1676 in your pew bibles.

We'll be looking at John 15:1-8.

People of God, hear the Word of the Lord.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The Word of the Lord. **(Thanks be to God)**

If we were to be honest with ourselves...

What is it that we want out of life?

When do we feel like we’re at our best?

What’s going on when we experience the greatest sense of contentment?

(TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THIS)

Some of us are probably thinking:

“Well, I’d like to rest...”

“This season is just getting going and I’m already feeling exhausted.”

I get that...

But when we are actually able to rest...

When we carve out time for ourselves to be refreshed...

What do we find ourselves doing?

We start producing.

It is hard to be idle.

I would like to argue that when it comes down to it, we all want the same thing from life.

We want purpose.

We want to feel useful.

We want to know that we’re not just wasting space and taking up oxygen.

We feel at our best when we’re contributing to some greater good.

Think about the last time you felt this way.

Maybe it was at Community Corner this past week...

You spent time with our neighbors shooting hoops or just talking with them.

You felt like God used your presence to bless the children that come into the church.

Or maybe it was at work this past week...

You were able to accomplish something in your job that made you feel good.

Where you knew that God used your gifts to do good work...

To put out a quality product...

Or to bless a child at school or at home...

Or to be faithful in your tasks...

Maybe it was saying something encouraging to your neighbor at the Emmanuel Home.

We want to use our gifts...

We want to participate in something bigger than ourselves...

We want our lives to matter...

We want to bear fruit.

As we read in verse 8, this is what our Lord wants too.

Our loving God receives glory when we bear fruit.

And if you're familiar with the Westminster Catechism we know what our chief end is.

What is the chief end of humanity? (Q&A 1)

“To glorify God.”

Christ's aim was always to glorify the Father.

Everything he did pointed back to the Father.

“This is to my *Father's* glory, that you bear much fruit...” Jesus says.

This is our end too.

Our purpose is to glorify the Father.

And we do this by producing fruit, “showing ourselves to be Christ's disciples.”

Now go out and bear fruit!

NO.

It doesn't work like that, does it?

We can't just force ourselves to bear fruit, can we?

Who here has watched the Simpsons before?

If you haven't, one of the main characters is Homer Simpson.

He's a bald cartoon character that has two thin strands of hair on his head.

For those of us here who have lost or are losing hair...

We know how important every strand can be.

In one episode, Homer somehow gets one of his two strands of hair chopped off.

So what does he do?

He closes his eyes, makes a funny grunting noise, and pushes another strand from his scalp.

All grown back...just like that.

Wouldn't it be great if this is how we produced fruit?

If we just tried hard enough each of us would show up with large cornucopias of fruit...

In season and out of season.

But as it is, this is not how life works.

We are a broken people.

(We heard Pastor Rich preach on the doctrine of original sin last Sunday evening)

We desire to be used by God...

We really want to be fruitful...

But we are selfish with our time.

We put off getting involved until we find the free time.

Or we're afraid to put ourselves out there;

"What will the people at school say if I step out to bless the outsider?"

And if we're not selfish or scared...

We run out of energy.

We want to bear more fruit but we're tired.

Our resources are dried up.

Then we become angry at those people not producing fruit alongside of us.

Every bit of our *sinful nature* works against us bearing fruit.

And every bit of the *enemy's strength* goes into keeping us fruitless.

In our passage this morning, Jesus is talking with his disciples.

He's telling them about his upcoming departure.

He's getting them ready...

Trying to comfort them.

Peter asks Jesus in Chapter 13: "Lord, where are you going?"

Thomas says to Jesus in Chapter 14:

"Lord we don't know where you're going, how can we know the way?"

Jesus has been with them for a few years so they look to him for guidance.

We can understand why they sound confused...

Why they sound a little troubled when he talks about leaving them.

They're probably thinking: "Wait a minute, you're *leaving*??!!!"

"What are we supposed to do without you here with us?"

So chapter 15 is part of this discourse where Jesus comforts his disciples...

Where he walks with them and prepares them for what's up ahead.

And what we read is not a command to produce more fruit...

We do read Jesus using imperative language...

Language where he commands them to do this or that.

But he doesn't tell them to bear more fruit!

He doesn't say: "Come on now guys. You really need to try harder at bearing fruit."

"I want to see you shooting grapes out of your fingertips!"

NO!

He says: “Remain in Me.”

“Stick with me.”

“Continue with me.”

“Make your home with me” as Dale Bruner says it.

Make your home with me and *then* you will bear much fruit.

Christ is our source of life...

We are the branches and he is the vine...

He supplies us with everything we need...

When we disconnect ourselves from him we become useless.

We become like branches that wither and are thrown away.

Like all of those dead sticks you find in the yard...

Good for the fire, or good for the dog to chew on.

When we disconnect from the vine we dry up.

Make your home with Christ.

Remain in Christ and we will bear much fruit.

While we're here, let's talk about some practical ways to make our home with Christ.

These suggestions come from Dale Bruner's commentary on John.

John uses the word “remain” (or some form of it) 98 times in his Gospel.

We can look at how he uses the word and get a good idea of what it means to remain in Christ...

To make our home with Jesus...

To know what it might mean to show ourselves to be his disciples.

In the 1st chapter of the Gospel, John the Baptist is preaching to the people.

He cries out, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

Two of John's disciples follow Jesus and ask where he's staying.

“Jesus, where are you making your home?”

So Jesus brings them along and spends the day with them.

Something similar happens when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).

After speaking to the woman, she leaves and goes back to town to tell the people.

They believe because of her testimony and go to see Jesus.

Then they invite him to stay/make their home with them.

And he stays 2 days.

Making our home with Jesus means that we're spending time with him.

We hear the preached word and we respond by being with Jesus in prayer.

Disciples take the time to talk honestly to Jesus.

To respond to his word in prayer with our doubts, and worries, fears, and frustrations.

Prayer does not always have to happen in a solitary place;

More often than not, we need prayer when we're around others.

It's okay, and it's good to send up a quick prayer:

“Lord give me strength.”

Or “Lord, I offer myself/my work to you.”

Sometimes just sitting in silence as if sitting comfortably in a room with a good friend.

Making our home with Jesus means that we respond to his Word in prayer.

Making our home with Jesus also means holding to his teaching.

John 8:31 says, “If you abide in my Word...”

“If you make your home in my Word, you are really my disciples.”

Hearing the preached Word at Sunday worship;

Getting together with a group to study his Word;

Having devotions before meals;

Reading it before bed;

Working at memorizing passages of Scripture;

Remaining in Jesus means making our home in his Word...

Living in his word.

And it doesn't end with just reading his word...

It means living *out* his Word.

John 15, just after our passage, says:

“Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.” (15:9-10)

Making our home in Jesus means we love one another.

He goes on to say, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Take a second to look around you.

I want to see heads turning here.

(Give a little head nod or smile if this feels awkward catching someone's eye)

These are your friends.

These are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

We all have the same Heavenly Father.

In Christ we have all been united as God's people.

Young/old/male/female/short/tall/married/single/black/white/goofy/serious

Together we are God's people.

And we are called to give up our lives for each other.

For most of us this won't mean physical death...

But for most of us it will mean something just as difficult.

Laying down our time;

Laying down our money;

Laying down our food;

Laying down our attention.

I have experienced so much of this from this congregation already.

You are doing a great job!

Keep running the race.

Lay down your lives for your co-workers.

For your neighbors.

Your neighbors at home...

Around the church...

And at the Emmanuel Home.

Making our home with Jesus means loving one another.

Christ commands us to remain in him.

Brothers and Sisters, I do not want us to see this as another burden.

Another thing to add to our already busy schedules.

I want us to see this as an invitation.

This is an invitation from Jesus the Messiah...

The Son of God.

“Make your home in me, as I have already made my home in you.”

Our verses today are not conditional “if” “then” statements.

He does not say, “*If* you make your home in me, *then* I will make my home in you.”

He says, “I’ve already made my home with you.”

“Church, I invite you, make your home with me!”

Yes, Christ left his disciples.

It was necessary for him to go to the Father.

We know how it goes:

He was crucified, died and was buried.

On the third day he rose from the dead,

And he ascended to Heaven.

But Christ remains with us.

Although Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us,

We have his Spirit with us.

By the Spirit, Christ remains with us.

He took the initiative to make his home in us.

And as we trudge through this life...

As we go through life desiring to bear fruit...

Feeling most alive when our gifts are used...

We are told that he is already with us.

He wants the Father to receive glory through our fruit.

He makes us acceptable to God...

Makes our fruit acceptable to God...

And provides what we need to produce fruit.

This morning we come together at the Lord's Table.

This is another way we make our home with Christ.

But it's not so much something *we do* as it is something *he does*.

In John 6 Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."

"Whoever partakes of this meal, makes their home in me."

In this sacrament we are unable to give anything.

For what can we give to a God who already gave it all?

We come to the Table to receive.

We receive what Christ has done for us.

By faith, we receive the true body and true blood of Christ our only Savior.

We receive his sacrifice for us and we receive his presence.

People of God, we will sing a song of thanksgiving for God's Word,

And then we will come together to strengthen the union we share with Christ...

For in this meal we make our home with Christ as he makes his home with us.

Amen.