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John 15:1-8 – *Intentionally Connecting with Christ*

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John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain 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. ⁶ If 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This 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**)

A lot of you are hungry...

We hear those deep rumblings coming from you.

Not from your stomach...

But from your spirit.

You’re hungry for God.

You’re hungry specifically for Christ.

Maybe you’ve been a believer for years...

But you’re at a place in life where you want to grow:

You want more of God in your life;

You want your life to be more centered on Christ...

You want all of your life to reflect your devotion to him.

You want all of your decisions in life to come from this intimate relationship with him.

Or maybe you're relatively new in your relationship with Christ.

You've tasted of his goodness and love...

And you want more of it.

You want to learn more about who he is and what he's about.

This is what we heard from all of our listening...

Our Renewal Lab team heard that there was a hunger to connect with Christ.

This is going to continue to be a primary emphasis at Trinity CRC...

Intentionally connecting with Christ.

This morning we're going to talk about the Who? Why? and How? of it.

With whom are we connecting?

Let's spend some time just on the opening verse—

Talking about who Jesus is—

The one with whom we're looking to connect.

In v.1 of our passage Jesus says:

“I am the true vine...”

It's easy to pass over if we're not reading carefully...

But Jesus says “I AM.”

With these two words Jesus is making a very bold claim.

Do you know why the words, “I AM” are significant?

Back in the Old Testament—

When God reveals himself to Moses—

Moses asks God for his name:

“When the people ask who sent me, what do I tell them?”

God says, “Tell the Israelites, I AM has sent you.” (Exo 3:14)

I AM is the name of God...

It's the way that he chooses to reveal himself.

Now Jesus comes along and he says, “I AM.”

It’s not the first time he’s said this either...

This isn’t just a coincidence.

Our passage is the last of Jesus’ 7 ‘I AM’ statements:

I am the bread of life;

I am the light of the world;

I am the gate for the sheep...

I am the true vine.

Jesus is echoing back to Exodus when God reveals his name...

Jesus is saying, “This is me.”

I am God.

Just a few chapters before this in John 8 Jesus says:

“Before Abraham was born, I AM!” (8:58)

There’s no doubt that the people know what Jesus is saying...

He’s saying he is God.

How would you respond if someone you were talking with claimed to be God?

You’d think they were out of their mind.

You’d probably be offended at such an arrogant claim...

The Jews pick up stones to kill him.

But this is who Jesus claims to be.

And, if we believe in the words of Scripture—

If we believe in the testimonies that have been passed down to us—

Then we believe this claim...

That God came down to live as one of us.

That when we connect with Christ...

We’re connecting with God himself.

Moving on to the next part of the first verse Jesus says, “I am the true vine.”

Vine imagery is common in the Old Testament. (e.g. Isa 5:1-7; Eze 15; 17; 19)

It is most often used to describe Israel...

The people that God enters into a relationship with.

And whenever it describes Israel as a vine...

It talks about how *unfruitful* they are:

“I looked for my vineyard to yield good grapes...”

“But it only yielded bad ones.”

“The Lord looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;”

“He looked for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.” (Isa 5:1-7)

As God’s covenant people...

Israel was supposed to be obedient to God...

They were supposed to produce good fruit with their lives...

This was their job as God’s people...

Their way of honoring the great I AM.

But they didn’t.

They were like useless piece of wood...

Only good for the fire.

Jesus says, “I am the *true* vine.”

“I am what God’s people were supposed to be.”

“With my life I produce fruit.”

“I have been obedient to all of God’s commands.”

This is why we say “...connecting with *Christ*.”

Because Jesus *Christ* means Jesus the Anointed One...

The one chosen by God to save God’s people.

Jesus *Christ* comes and does what we couldn’t do...

Living as one of us...

But living a perfect life...

Free from any sin.

And he gives that perfect obedience to us.

It's like Jesus doing all of the homework that we didn't do.

We've been in school for years now and haven't done one assignment...

You know what it's like to have a dream (nightmare) where we forget our homework...

This is like having it be real life for all of our assignments and tests...

We're failing.

But Jesus was the perfect student who got 100% marks on all of his exams and diplomas.

He comes in and he says, "Here, take my work..."

"All of my perfect marks."

"It's yours."

It's as if we lived the perfect life Jesus lived.

When we ask, "Who is this Christ we are connecting with..."

It's none other than God himself...

Who has come to live among us...

To give himself to us, so that we might have life.

That's the "Who."

Now, what about the "Why?"

Last week we started with the end of the vision statement:

"...for the glory of God."

Everything that we do is to point to God and say:

"Look at how awesome our God is!"

"Look at how good of a Creator he is!"

"Look at how merciful of a Savior he is!"

"Look at how he provides for all of our needs!"

"See how he is holy and eternal and all-powerful above everyone else!"

The *main* answer for “why” we connect with Christ—

Our motivation for doing anything in this life—

Is to glorify God.

But let’s look at some other important reasons we connect with Christ.

First, it is the essence of Christianity.

Our union with *Christ* is the heart of Christianity.

It may seem obvious...

But so often we make it about anything but Christ—

Anything but who Jesus is and what he has done.

Theologian Michael Horton has a book called *Christless Christianity*.

In it he says:

My concern is that we are getting dangerously close to the place in everyday American church life where God is used as a personal resource rather than known, worshiped and trusted; **Jesus Christ is a coach with a good game plan for our victory rather than a Savior who has already achieved it for us**; salvation is more a matter of having our best life now than being saved from God’s judgment by God himself...**Jesus has become supplemental instead of instrumental to the church.**

The essence of Christianity is being united to Jesus Christ...*our Savior*.

Why do we “connect with Christ”?

Because apart from him we have no life...

Apart from him we remain under the weight, guilt and judgment of our sin.

“Remain in me” is not so much a command or a warning...

It’s an invitation to life...

It’s an invitation to join in the fellowship of the Triune God.

When we’re connected with Christ—

When we trust in his life, death, resurrection and ascension—

We are welcomed back into God’s family.

We become children of God.

No longer enemies of God because of our sin...

But children who are deeply loved and cared for.

Jesus Christ is our lifeline...

Without him we are like a branch that withers away and dies.

Christianity—

This faith we profess—

Is all about Jesus...

Who he is and what he's done for us.

The essence of Christianity is our union with him.

Right on the heels of being the essence of Christianity—

We connect with Christ because apart from him “we can do nothing.” (15:5)

Producing fruit and showing ourselves to be disciples of Jesus brings glory to God (15:8)—

But Jesus plainly says, you cannot produce fruit by yourself...(15:6)

You must remain connected to Christ...

The branch (us) must stay connect to the vine (Christ).

And when we remain connected with Christ, we see all kinds of fruit produced:

We are obedient to the way God wants us to live our lives;

We experience the joy of being in a relationship with God;

We grow in our love for other people;

And we grow in our witness to the world of God's greatness. (DA Carson)

But this doesn't happen in a branch that is disconnected from the source.

That's the Who? and the Why?

Now for the How?

This is the big question.

How do we connect with Christ?

How do we remain in the vine?

When we talk about connecting with Christ...

We're talking about being Christ's disciples.

We're talking about growing in our love for God...

Growing in our intimacy with him...

Growing in our willingness to surrender our lives to him.

How do we connect with Christ?

First, recognize where you're at in your relationship with him.

In our passage Jesus is speaking to his disciples after 3 years of walking with them...

3 years of walking side-by-side with Jesus gets you pretty intimate with him.

So Jesus is able to say:

"Remain in me."

"Continue to be rooted in me."

"Keep having all of your lives centered on me."

But this isn't where the disciples started.

In John 1 the disciples first encounter Jesus:

They say, "Teacher, where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replies, "and you will see."

So, they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. (1:38-39)

What would have happened if—

In this first encounter—

Jesus would have said, "Remain in me."

I could imagine a lot of confused looks and head scratching:

"I don't know who you are."

"Can I trust you?"

It's the same for us.

For some of us Jesus is still a stranger.

We don't really know who he is and what he's about.

We haven't been closely walking with him for years like the disciples in John 15...

So, this call to "remain in him" doesn't do much for us.

We need the invitation the disciples *first* received:

“Come and see.”

“Come and get to know me.”

If you’re unsure of Jesus—

Or if he’s not a big part of your daily life—

The invitation to you is to come and see...

Continue to come and learn more about him in Sunday worship...

Find somewhere where you can ask your questions...

And wrestle through these first hurdles.

Maybe you trust Christ—

You’ve been walking with him for some time—

But you’ve hit a wall.

You’ve seemed to slowed down in your growth.

You’re still growing, but the growth you experienced early on has slowed down.

Sunday worship helps you grow still...

But not in the way it used to when you were still newer to the faith...

When you were like a sponge soaking everything up.

For you, connecting with Christ will look different.

Maybe you need to join a smaller group of people with which to study God’s word.

Maybe you took advantage of the Bible Interpretation class that was just held.

The point is that we’re not all in the same place as Jesus’ disciples...

We need to ask ourselves where we’re at...

And look at what we need to do to grow.

And this is what we’re looking at as a church...

How do we help identify where we’re at...

And then where can we plug in to make sure we’re growing.

As a part of the Renewal Lab process we're trying to develop tools...

And a discipleship pathway to give us the best chance of growing as Christ's disciples.

That's one thing...knowing where you're at.

What else we'll say about how to connect with Christ...

Is that we have to be intentional.

There's a quote that says:

"You are perfectly designed to get the results you are currently getting."

If you are not growing in Christ...

What you are doing is perfect to keep you headed in that direction...

Not changing anything will keep you disconnected from Christ.

If you want to grow in love for God...

Changes must be made...

And these changes must be intentional.

The culture and world we live in is *not* designed to point us to Christ:

It points us back to ourselves;

It points us to other god's;

It tries to distract us from Christ;

And take the focus off of him.

It tells us to worship money and sex and power;

It tells us to live for happiness and comfort;

It tells us to base everything we think and do off of ourselves...

And what feels right to us.

If we want to grow as Christ's disciples, we need to make *intentional* decisions...

Because it's not just going to happen.

It's something we need to pour our whole lives into.

It's something that requires sacrifice...

And priority adjustment.

It *will* require us to suffer:

“Every branch that does bear fruit God prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”
(15:2)

Expect that growing in Christ will be challenging.

Growth will come through pain.

It will be tough...

But it will be worth it.

Because this is what we are designed for...

To connect with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is where we find life.

This is just a smell from the kitchen of where we're heading as a church...

Hopefully your appetite is growing and you're ready to feast.

Let's pray.