

Vine and branches      John 15:1-8      Easter 5 April 29, 2018

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Dear friends in Christ, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know, but today is confirmation day. It is the day where we see that God is true to his promises; that those connected to Christ and cleansed in the waters of baptism have been kept in the faith, as they make their confession today. Today we see that God's word abides among his people

So it is good today that we read Jesus' words given to his disciples the night he was betrayed. Where he tells them to abide in him even when they do not see him. To abide in him even when it is not easy, as he goes to the cross, and later returns to the father. They will be scattered and alone, and will be tempted to seek their own way. So he speaks to them, and tells them they remain his as the branches are the vines. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Today you confirmands will make vows. You will make vows that you will continue steadfast and even suffer death rather than fall away from Christ. And this is a big vow. It is bigger than you can make on your own. As you learned to say, I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. You can do nothing apart from him, not even believe.

But if we cannot even believe, then how can we make vows? How can we abide? The 4 gathered here know, that the spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with the gifts. God himself gathers us to himself through his word through his sacraments. Christ died to release us from sin and bring us to life in him, and we receive that salvation he won through his gifts, through these means of grace. Faith is not an act of strength on our part but a trust in the one who holds us in his gifts.

So remain in the word. Attend church to hear it as it is preached. Continue in your catechism hear it in your homes. Return to your gift of baptism as he again declares you children of God as he absolves your sin. Receive that same forgiveness won on the cross as you proclaim it in receiving his body and blood. In this way Christ abides in you and you in him.

And don't seek your own way. We give you a verse at confirmation, and you picked them. But these words are not for us to see you, nor bits of wisdom for your life. They are to let you see Christ, so the spirit will keep you abiding in Christ and his word as you hear these words, that you bear fruit.

See Christ as you remember with Joshua, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." He went into the land of his enemies, yet God was with him. He has given you gifts of his word and spirit as well, and as he abides in you you will bear fruit. God desires your salvation, so do not be afraid. In his gifts he is with you wherever you go, and not even Satan and hell will stand to separate you from your rest in him.

See Christ as you hear the words of Paul, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Remember that God is faithful and abides in you. He has confronted not just temptation but the tempter himself, and sin is forgiven. There is a way out, and I is Christ.

See Christ in the words spoken to Mary, whose strength was small. "For nothing will be impossible with God." Remember that these are not a cheer for our ability, but that God sent his son to be born of a

virgin to save sinners like you. God does the impossible, and sinners are declared righteous. Abide in him and remain in his righteousness.

And see Christ in the words spoken to Asa, King of Judah, "But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded." Remember that these were spoken to the king on David's throne, and speak even more clearly to Christ. That his suffering and death are not in vain, and in him alone the world is saved. And all of us kept in the faith abide in him, so that his work is rewarded as we are saved.

More than that, as Christ says, the work he completed on the cross continues today. The salvation of the world continues as that word is preached, as we share his word, in our actions surely but even more in our words. We bear much fruit in the kingdom, as we share the word, for it is Christ's work as we abide in him.

Follow your lord, turning neither right nor left Follow him alone. In the gifts he gives. Abide in him and his word, for apart from him you can do nothing.. Bear the fruit he gives.