

Sermon Title: **“I am the vine, you are the branches.”**

Bible: **Psalm 22:25-31 & John 15:1-8**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, May 2, 2021

Audience: about 30 people (including 15 Youtube viewers)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, you are the vinegrower. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, you are the true vine. We are your branches. You abide in us. And we abide in you. Please guide us to bear much fruit. Please be with my lips and mouth in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. How do we know fruit?

I became a member of the United Methodist Church in 2012. While I was in seminary, I started my ordination process to become an ordained elder, an ordained pastor. While I was discerning my calling, I needed to submit many documents, and I was required to be interviewed, using Wesley's historic questions. The following are some of them:

1. Do they know God as pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? 2. Have they gifts, as well as evidence of God's grace, for the work? 3. Have they fruit?

If you were me, or if our church were me, how would you answer these questions? Do we know God as pardoning God? Have we the love of God abiding in us? Have we gifts, as well as evidence of God's grace, for the work? And the last one, which is, Have we fruit?

Today's scripture readings come from the lectionary for the fifth Sunday of Easter. The Gospel of John 15:5 says “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them

bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” What fruit do you have? How can we show or prove that we have fruit?

2. Spirit of Fruit?

Any ideas? I cannot give you THE answer. My thoughts are not THE answer. But I hope that my message will give you some ideas. First of all, Galatians 5:22-23 says “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Among 9 fruits of the Spirit, what fruit do you have? (YouTube viewers, please use the YouTube live-chat to answer this) If you look at yourself, before COVID-19 and now, what fruit do you bear more of? Love? Peace? Patience? Kindness? Generosity? Faithfulness? Gentleness? Self-control? How can we show that we have more fruit, even during this pandemic? What evidence can we show?

You might have some stories to share, but most of the spiritual fruit is not easy to prove. I am not sure if we can say that I have only a level 3 of patience before COVID-19, but now, I have a level 7 of patience, because I need to be patient in many things during COVID-19. Can I evaluate my patience this way? Does this make sense? Or does it sound strange?

3. Vital Signs?

One way that I use to prove the fruit is to look at the numbers. Definitely, the numbers cannot show all of me or all of us. But I found the numbers to be powerful and persuasive tools. For example, when I need to share about our church’s stewardship campaign, I use the following table.

Stewardship Campaign	Pledges that the church received
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For 2017	2
For 2018	5
For 2019	12
For 2020	20
For 2021	25

(* Membership: 69 / Average Worship Attendance: 31)

Our membership is 69, and average worship attendance is 31. For 5 years, the numbers of the pledges that the church received have been increasing year by year: for 2017, 2, for 2018, 5, for 2019, 12, for 2020, 20. For 2021, the church received 25 pledges, even during this time of uncertainty. Then, I can say that the stewardship campaign was successful, right? I can say that our congregation has a fruit of generosity, right?

I would like to share other numbers. Before COVID-19, the average number for our worship attendance was 35. During COVID-19, before our Hybrid Worship, more than 27 people came to our YouTube Worship. If we consider those who cannot access online, and if we consider our technological learning curve about computers, YouTube, FaceTime, Google Duo, Zoom, etc., I am sure that this number of 27 is a great number. Our congregation faithfully gathers and worships together. Yes, I see a fruit of faithfulness in us.

4. Bearing Much Fruit? For The Poor & Future Generations?

Furthermore, when I read today's Psalm, I am so thankful to be a part of this congregation. Psalm 22:26 says, "The poor shall eat and be satisfied." Even during this time of the unknown, our lay leadership team considers not only our survival, but also those who are having difficulty in this time. Our lay leadership team has decided to support St. Joseph's Family Center

financially. Every month, from last November to the month of April, the church has sent \$250 from our main checking account. Even though we cannot help those who need help face-to-face, we find our way to help them. Our wonderful United Methodist Women also help the Gilroy Compassion Center to make sandwich lunches every 4th Monday. We need to keep our social distance, but the social distance cannot stop our kindness from helping each other. Yes, we have a fruit of kindness.

I hope that you remember our first two children's times on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. To think of our future generations, to pray for our children is such a joy to me. Shall we want to share joy with our future generations? If you have joy, and if you want to share your joy with our future generations, please contact me. I plan to have Children's Time at least once a month.

5. We Are The Branches & Holy Communion

Our Lord, Jesus Christ said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." To bear much fruit, we just need to abide in our Lord. This might be simple, but not that easy. We have the Holy Communion today. God welcomes all of us to God's table. Just be yourself. Just come as you are. God loves you. God calls you. God leads you. Come, eat, and drink with our Lord. Then, we will bear much fruit. Jesus Christ is the vine, and we are the branches.

Closing Prayer

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, you are the vine. We are the branches. Please help us to come to you as we are. Please show us your love and mercy. Please lead us to be close to you more and more.

In Jesus' name. Amen.