

Acts 16:11-15
April 29, 2018

Easter 5
153-168-505-469

“I Am the Vine; You Are the Branches”

- I. By faith we are connected to Jesus.
- II. A living faith produces fruit in our lives.

Dear Christian friends,

I had thought it was DONE **picking up branches**. At the end of February I got two big piles of branches picked up. Then came that **snow and ice storm** two weeks ago. The ground is covered with branches - dead as dead can be branches. **How** can I be SO SURE? They're on the ground – broken off the tree! The ONLY THING I can do is pick them up – pile them by the curb – and let the city haul them away. Or as Jesus said in the gospel reading, ***“Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”***

“I am the Vine; you are the branches,” we heard Jesus say. This story of Lydia ILLUSTRATES those words. Through the gospel Lydia was brought to faith in Jesus – she was connected to Jesus. **Lydia's faith** showed itself alive – PROVED it was a **real faith** by producing fruit in her life. Guided by Jesus' words – ***“I am the Vine; you are the branches”*** – we learn from Lydia that 1)by faith we are connected to Jesus and that 2)a living faith produces fruit in our lives.

I. By faith we are connected to Jesus.

Luke sets the scene for Lydia's story. ***“After we put out to sea from Troas, we sailed straight to Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis. From there we went to Philippi.”*** That doesn't mean a WHOLE LOT to you, does it?

Paul was on his second missionary journey. He's revisited the churches he **had founded** on his first trip – churches located in what we **today would call** central Turkey. Paul had wanted to move on to NEW areas in **western** or **northern** Turkey but God had OTHER PLANS. ***“A vision appeared to Paul during the night. A Macedonian man was standing there, urging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ As soon as he had seen the vision, we immediately made plans to proceed to Macedonia, because we concluded that God had called us to preach the good news to them.”***

So as Luke told us Paul SAILED FROM **northwest Turkey** to northern Greece. Paul's in the province of **Macedonia**. He's come to Philippi - a MAJOR CITY in that area. Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon – the father of **Alexander** the Great. But that was now old history. Philippi was now part of the Roman empire. **In fact, it was classified** as a ***“Roman colony.”*** A large number of veteran Roman soldiers had settled there. Latin was the official language. The people were considered Roman citizens. It was a LITTLE ROME located in northern Greece.

Paul liked to begin his mission work in the LOCAL synagogue. **There** he would find people familiar with the OT and **God's promises** of the Savior. FROM the synagogue Paul could then branch out into the city. Jewish tradition was that it **took at least ten** men to organize a synagogue. There weren't even ten men in Philippi to organize a synagogue! The very few Jews there – mostly women it seems – would instead meet ***“outside the city gate alongside the river.”*** Among those women was Lydia - a GENTILE CONVERT to the Jewish faith. Lydia was originally from ***“the city of Thyatira”*** in **west-central** Turkey – a city famous for its ***“purple cloth”*** industry. Lydia had moved to Philippi and was evidently quite successful as ***“a dealer in purple cloth.”***

We're told in the Bible that ***“faith comes from hearing the message – the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”*** Jesus put it this way, ***“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”*** So we see here with Lydia. Paul ***“went outside the city gate alongside the river and began to talk to the women who had gathered there.”*** You can bet that they WEREN'T TALKING the **weather**. As Lydia ***“was listening ... the Lord opened her heart to pay close attention***

to what Paul was saying.” It takes God Himself to BRING US to faith and so connect us to Jesus. God does that THROUGH His Word – through the proper teaching of God’s law and gospel.

With the law God confronts us with our **sin** and guilt – our rebellion and **defiance**. It’s humbling and PAINFUL to **honestly compare** our daily lives with God’s 10 Commandments. **With those commandments** God directly orders us to ALWAYS PUT Him **first** in our lives – and to show just that in our **prayer** and worship life – our marriages and **family life** – our work and **social** life. Yet how often haven’t we instead PUSHED GOD OFF to the side – put our sinful natures ahead of God - followed the world instead of God. That’s not just a MISTAKE or BAD CHOICE. That’s sin and it **has** ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES – hell’s eternal banishment and punishment.

Crushed by God’s law the gospel points us to Jesus – **God’s own Son** – as our perfect Savior. The gospel proclaims the GOOD NEWS that Jesus took the place of **all people** under God’s law and He has **taken care of everything** to save us. Giving us all the credit Jesus perfectly obeyed every commandment His whole life through. Carrying the sins of the **world** Jesus went to His cross and was there punished in our place. Jesus’ innocent death on the cross FULLY PAID for all sins of all people. Not only that, Jesus ROSE triumphant from the dead on Easter morning and He shares His victory with us.

That’s the message Paul shared with Lydia and through that gospel God **“opened her heart”** and brought Lydia to trust in Jesus as her Savior. Connected by faith to Jesus Lydia – WE! – RECEIVE **from Jesus** God’s love and His forgiveness of all our sins – we have peace with God – a whole new relationship with God – we have the privilege of prayer and the comfort of God’s **presence** and **promises** – we’re now going straight to heaven when we die.

“I am the Vine; you are the branches.” Learn from Lydia the IMPORTANCE of Christian education and mission work. BOTH are all about sharing the gospel with others – our children and grandchildren – our country and world. NOBODY can become a Christian WITHOUT HEARING the gospel **somehow** or other.

“Remain in me,” is Jesus’ command to us – **“and I am going to remain in you”** is His promise to us. GUESS WHAT? There’s only one way to **“remain”** in Jesus – to stay connected to Jesus. That’s THROUGH the gospel. NOBODY can become a Christian and **nobody can stay** a Christian **without being in** God’s Word. That’s why church – Baptism – Communion – Bible class – daily devotions are so important. THAT’S HOW we **“remain”** in Jesus. **If we’re not in** God’s Word we can easily become a BRANCH BROKEN OFF. And just like ALL THOSE BRANCHES I have to pick up there are unfortunately so many **“branches”** that have not stayed connected to Jesus.

“I am the Vine; you are the branches.” By faith we are **connected** to Jesus and as we also see in Lydia...

II. A living faith bears fruit in our lives.

I pruned my apple tree the end of February. There’s only one more thing I need to do SO IT’S READY for this summer. I need to talk to it and remind it to bear apples. I just hate it when my apple tree grows carrots and **raisins**. OH WAIT – that’s dumb, isn’t it! I DON’T HAVE to tell my apple tree to grow apples. That’s JUST WHAT it does automatically. BY NATURE apple trees grow apples.

Listen again to Jesus. **“I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in Me. My Father is glorified by this: that you continue to bear much fruit and prove to be My disciples.”** So we see in Lydia here. **“When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”**

Lydia didn't wait for PAUL TO ASK for her help. She asked Paul. She VOLUNTEERED to help! It SEEMS Paul hesitated at first to **accept her offer**. We know Paul didn't like to IMPOSE on others. But Lydia wouldn't take "no" for an answer. She **"persuaded"** Paul – literally PUSHED Paul – to accept her offer. It also seems Lydia's example SET THE TONE for the **congregation that formed** in Philippi. Read Paul's letter to the Philippians in your devotions this week. Paul mentions how the Philippians REGULARLY SUPPORTED him and his work even after he left them to work in other places.

With the warm weather predicted for this week I would think the trees would START BUDDING out, etc. I know the branches on the ground are DEAD. **How do we know** that the **branches connected** to the tree are ALIVE and **healthy**? We don't break them off to look at them! We can't see the sap flowing through them. We see the buds and leaves on the OUTSIDE of the branch. A branch without a lot of buds is **probably** a SICK – WEAK branch.

We can't look into anyone's **heart**. Only God and I can look into MY heart and we can fool ourselves pretty easily. I CAN SAY I love God – that I'm a Christian – but **what's** MY LIFE SAYING about my faith and my relationship with God? Can people just watching and listening to me SEE THE DIFFERENCE **Jesus makes** in my life? Do my priorities in life – my morals and values – the language I use – the way I treat and **talk about** other people – my attitude and **work ethic** – do they SHOW MY HEART filled with Jesus – changed by God's love? Is my daily life showing a LIVING – GROWING **faith** in Jesus or a WEAK – DYING faith? Are there some weeds that need to **be pulled up** in my life so that they don't choke out my faith? Are there some suckers that need to **be cut off** to HELP MY GROW even stronger in Jesus? JUST LIKE our gardens and trees there's always more work to do in our Christian lives!

Those are tough questions to ask – questions we need to answer HONESTLY. We're talking about our PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with God – the health of our faith in Jesus – **our soul's eternal salvation**. We see Lydia here – **connected** to Jesus – **producing** fruit. We've heard Jesus say, **"I am the Vine; you are the branches."** Amen.

Hymn #505