

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/8/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Yesterday, as I was driving to a meeting in Fullerton, I passed a new non-denominational church called “Branches.” My immediate reaction was, “What a great name for a church!” I really mean that, too.

In John 15:5, JESUS says, “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.”

We may not know as much about grapevines as the people of JESUS’ time and place, but the meaning is clear. Branches connected to the main stalk, the vine, can produce the fruit. If they are cut off, they wither and die. They don’t produce fruit. JESUS is giving us a clear image of the importance and value of making sure we are joined to HIM, the VINE, in focus and purpose.

Yet often we fail to recognize the importance of that connection. Perhaps it’s because we don’t think about the call to produce fruit. The fruit JESUS is talking about is those things that help to spread GOD’s Kingdom to others and that give glory to GOD’s name. If we don’t have that focus, we likely won’t think much about the need to be grafted into JESUS’ teachings and example. If we don’t recognize JESUS’ call to make disciples or to love others as HE loved us, we may not consider the importance of being joined to the VINE. But when consider what GOD has done for us, especially in the life, death, and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, we will find ourselves pulled toward the response of seeking to be a part of what GOD is doing in the world. And the more we remain in CHRIST’s love and teaching, the better we will be able to produce that valuable fruit that GOD desires us to create.

Those who have intentionally cut themselves off from the VINE of the body of CHRIST, both HIS Church and HIS Sacrament of the altar, have chosen to produce less fruit. Like the vine that is cut off from the main branch of the grapevine, they have decided to do less for the LORD rather than more. And, even if they still desire to be of service to the LORD, they have made it harder for themselves to do so. For it is when we are consistently grafted into VINE that we receive what GOD provides to assist us in doing that work. Apart from the VINE, our efforts to be what GOD desires for us to be become so much harder.

I certainly am not advocating for a name change to our church. But I do think consideration of ourselves branches connected to the VINE of JESUS can be a very helpful image for motivating our joining to HIM. Without JESUS we are extremely limited in what we can do for GOD. But when tied to HIM we can produce great fruit.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey