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Branching Out

John 15:1-8

I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the good shepherd; I am the way, the truth and the life... All the way through the gospel of John, we hear Jesus using these “I am” statements. At the end of his life, at the last supper, he finally told the disciples who they were. He said, I am the vine – YOU ARE the branches. The lovely thing about this statement is that it is just that – a statement. There are no additional caveats like, *you are the branches IF you go to church every Sunday. Or You are the branches IF you are perfect in every way.* Nothing like that! Jesus said, You ARE the branches. Go bear some fruit!

What fruits grow on vines? Call it out! [grapes, kiwi, melon, strawberry, raspberry, tomatoes] Okay – you are a branch on a strawberry vine, and you are branch on a grape vine. There is no expectation that the grape branch will bear a strawberry or a strawberry branch will bear a grape fruit (or a grápefruit!). Think of it this way - It can be easy for us to have expectations of ourselves or others to be able to do certain things, like study harder, or work faster, or be creative, when we may not be that kind of a branch.

The church/ the body of Christ is the kind of vine that can nurture all the branches, no matter which way they are growing or what their purposes are. The Church is where creativity, finance, teaching, music, technology, gardening, engineering, preaching, organizing, reading, writing, welcoming, cooking, translating, serving and everything else can happen, all empowered and nourished by the same vine.

It's true, however, that not all branches bear fruit all the time. Vinedressers keep track of how things are going. Grapevines, if left unattended, will grow along the ground, and will send little roots down into

the soil rather than produce any fruit. When a vinedresser comes along, and sees branches lying on the ground, he knows that what they need is not to draw their own nutrients from the soil, but to get their nutrients from the vine. So the vinedresser lifts the branch up off the ground and supports it above ground with a trellis or lattice work.<sup>1</sup> In Jesus' analogy, God is the vinedresser, Jesus is the vine, and the disciples are the branches. Each part is reliant on the other.

Here's another analogy in case grapevines aren't your thing: We have a fountain in our back yard that is run by a pump. Steve or I fill the fountain with water. When the pump is running, the water from the bottom basin goes to the top, and the water spills down to the next basin, the next and then into the bottom basin again. The water is from The Creator, and the church is the pump that keeps everything moving, and we're all basins. You may be the top basin, and your gifts spill into my basin which spills into your basin, and so on. Apart from the other basins, one basin by itself can't be filled by or fill up another. Likewise, all the basins without a pump just sit there. The water - from God - gives the pump and the basins a purpose.

The children who were dedicated today are branches with very special gifts. Our role is to be the vine that provides nourishment, and to teach them who the Vinedresser is. They are also basins waiting to be filled and to fill others. By example and genuine love we will show them how the church, the body of Christ, is a source of nourishment and a place to find purpose.

To the graduates we are celebrating today - You are the church - the vine that nurtures others around you. AND you are the branches bearing fruit. You are basins AND You function as the pump of the fountain, circulating the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/john/john\\_15\\_1-8/](https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/john/john_15_1-8/) Jeremy Myers

water of life to fill and overflow to others. We know you! We have seen you here taking care of each other, serving and helping the elders, playing with the younger kids, participating in worship, running the technology on Sundays, serving pancakes and going on international missions. You are already impacting the world AS the church. I encourage you to remain connected to this part of the vine/ this fountain of FMC, as a place where you know you are always loved and will always find nourishment at any point in your life.

Plants and fountains are systems of interlocking, interdependent parts that function as a whole. Thanks be to God for the gift of this intertwining of our lives, so we might all bear fruit and fill one another's basins.

Amen.

**John 15:1-8** "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 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.** Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.