

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus Christ, our resurrected Lord and Saviour. The title for today’s sermon is “Grafted into Christ” and is based on the Gospel reading from St. John the 15th chapter. Let us pray...Amen.

In the backyard of my wife’s grandfather house was a most unique tree. It didn’t look right, or normal, because every year the different branches bloomed with different colour blooms and different kinds of blooms. Then when the flowers dropped off and fruit began to appear there were different kinds of apples growing on the various branches, along with some other fruits, all on the same tree. This really confused me, mainly after everything I was taught in high school and university biology classes. Yet, to be honest, I spent most of my time studying animals and tried to avoid studying plants as much as possible. Still, a cousin of mine had told me something about the possibility of a fruit cocktail tree years earlier but I laughed it off thinking he was pulling my leg.

Still, of everything I was taught and remembered, an apple tree only produces one kind of apples. And most definitely an apple tree does not produce a variety of apples and/or pears or any other fruit. But there, before my eyes this tree was producing a variety of fruit.

Now, in talking to my wife and her grandfather, I found out how this fruit cocktail tree came about. The reason it was able to produce what it was producing was because of a process called grafting. I completely missed this concept or ignored it previously. But the reason there were the different branches on this tree was not because of the natural properties or genetics of the tree, but it was due to the very special work of a very dedicated vine, or tree branch dresser. By the work of his very careful hands he grafted, or attached, branches from different kinds of trees to this one. Then the new and different branches were fed and sustain by the tree. Year by year the new branches, fed by the tree, continues to grow and in their season began to also bear fruit. As they grew, my wife’s grandfather also pruned the branches to maximize their yield. What looked destructive at the time was actually for the good of the tree. I was also told, the better the graft, the better the branch is sustained and fed, and the better the branch in turn produces fruit.

We hear the same idea in today’s Gospel reading, but here Jesus is not just talking about trees or vines, here Jesus is talking about the gift of faith, life, and salvation and how we get it and keep it. Jesus says He is “**the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.**”(John 15:1) He is the One who supports and feeds the branches. He is the one who provides all the nutrient and water we need to live. In short, He is the One who provides the lifeblood that beats in our hearts and veins and which we need to survive now and for eternity.

Jesus, the One who came for you, who willingly took on all your sins, same, humiliation, shortcomings, and guilt. Jesus poured out His blood to cover all your sins and His physical resurrection proclaims His victory for you. Jesus, our crucified and physically risen Lord is the tree of life into whom we are grafted. The life we have is only in our resurrected Lord and Saviour. At Easter, and through the year we remember His death and celebrate His resurrection.

It is only in Jesus, the One Word made flesh, in whom we have eternal life because He pours out His life giving and sin forgiving blood on us. This life is not our own, rather it is a gift of God, from Baptism to our death. You freely receive gift of Christ’s salvation for you through Holy Baptism. “**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**”(Galatians 3:27) There in Baptism you also died with Christ, as Paul told the Galatians: “**I have been**

crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”(Galatians 2:20) The waters of Baptism connect us to God forever. Baptism, through water and the Word, creates faith in our hearts by which we are able to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is from God. Through Baptism, we are able to believe, to love, and to bear fruit. In the fulfillment of all deeds, witnessing, and believing, we are to abide in His Word, which is Christ Himself.

Just as with a branch, on our own, a branch broken or cut off from the tree is a dead branch. It might look nice for a while, but without being sustained, it quickly dies. Then, it’s only use is to be thrown into the fire and burnt. Yet will grafted to a living and healthy tree it grows and produces fruit. The only tree that can do this, our only Saviour is Christ Jesus who came in the flesh, took on our sins, carried them to the cross, died in our place, and physically rose on the third day. He is our only hope and the only One able to save.

Now, John proclaims in today’s second reading that there will be people who will come and who will proclaim A ‘jesus’, or A ‘christ’, or A ‘god’. Now it is extremely important to get the right one. While some talk about A ‘jesus’, they do not talk about the Jesus who physically was crucified for you and to pay for your sins. They will omit the whole cross and suffering and bleeding and dying FOR YOU and the FORGIVENESS OF ALL YOUR SINS. They will proclaim A ‘jesus’ but one who didn’t really and truly physically rise from the dead on the third day.

Some proclaim A ‘jesus’ who you have to find, who you have to give your life to, who you have to choose, but that god or christ or jesus is simply the devil in a fancy dress. He looks all pretty and will stroke your ego, and he will also slit your throat and slaughter you in a heartbeat. John tells us how the one who denies Jesus death for you and His physical resurrection for you and your salvation, the one who denies Christ crucified and risen for you is teaching the words of the devil. Really. The devil, through him is trying to siphoning any hope of the real Christ and His resurrection from you. He is of the world. The world loves to talk about our freedoms and our goodness and our innate righteousness. It doesn’t like to talk about weakness, or sins or our shortcomings. The world revels in our apparent inherent goodness and generosity, but it is all a bold and devilish lie. You and I were conceived and born in sin. We were by nature enemies of God and under His wrath. We have absolutely no righteousness of our own to offer of hide behind. We were like this branch, separated from God and dead, we just didn’t know it yet. But, again, that is why Christ came for you.

But where do we find Jesus. We often hear about His grace and love for us, but where is that gift attained. Well, first of all, a gift is never earned, it is freely received. This is most definitely true of the gift of faith, forgiveness, and salvation. Jesus didn’t just come for you to show you the way, He came and made you His own carrying you in Himself all the way. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, by water and the Word, the Holy Spirit found you and grafted you into Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection. He marked you as Christ’s own. The Holy Spirit continues to bring you these gifts of God, and promises where they will be. To try and find God or Christ or the Holy Spirit apart from where He promised to be: namely in His Word, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, to seek anywhere else it to seek for demons and the devil. Yet, here in His Word and Sacrament, Christ and His blood bought forgiveness and salvation are present and richly poured into you to strengthen your faith, to comfort you in this world, to proclaim you

have peace with God on account of Christ, and that you are saved. Nowhere else does Christ promise to be. Nowhere. But He promises to always be here.

Here we receive His gift of life and the strength to share it with the world around us. We have this freedom and blessing to share Christ and His gifts because we don't have to work out, or on our salvation, it is complete in Christ.

In the first reading today we heard about Philip, who guided by the Holy Spirit did just that with the Ethiopian eunuch. He shared with a stranger the Word of God in Christ Jesus. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Philip took the time to open this man's eye to see what the Old Testament prophesied about the Christ and how Jesus fulfilled it all through His crucifixion, death, and Resurrection for him and all people. This prompted the Ethiopian, in faith, at the sight of water to ask what prevented him from being baptized. He had heard the Word, of Christ and His promises and Christ's salvation. And there was nothing to prevent him. They stopped and, with the baptism of the eunuch, number of saints was increased that day. Philip then disappeared and found himself in Azotus and the Ethiopian eunuch carried on back home to Ethiopia. History and church tradition say that Ethiopian eunuch brought the Word of God back to Ethiopia and was the father of the Ethiopian church; from him the faith spread to the nation and in which today are millions of Christians.

The perfecting of God's love in us happens when we abide in His Word and His love causes us to love others.

In Christ, grace is delivered to you. By faith, the gift of faith, Christ's grace, is received in you.

You are also grafted into Christ, the tree of life, and His eternal lifeblood. Rejoice in Christ and your being grafted into Him. Hold fast to His gifts and where they are received. Rejoice in the waters of Holy Baptism where you live and continue to receive Christ's gifts, Rejoice in hearing His proclaim of Holy Absolution, your sins are all forgiven on account of Christ. Rejoice in hearing the Holy Gospel and playing and studying His Word. Rejoice in the forgiveness poured out in the Lord's Supper as heaven meets earth, Christ comes into our presence, where we join with all the saints who have gone before us and who will come after us, and where He feeds you His crucified and physically resurrected body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. Here He comes to us to, here in His Word and Sacrament—in the Divine Service—is where this grafting is kept strong, where we are fed, nourished, strengthened, loved, and cared for. The Holy Spirit continues to bring Christ to you and here He equips you to share the Good News of Christ with the world around you. Amen.

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