

14 May 2006  
Easter 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Fruit of the Resurrection”  
Text: John 15:1-8; Acts 8:26-40

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the words of Jesus that we heard today in the Holy Gospel, there was command and there was promise, and we usually get them confused.

The command is not to bear fruit – that is the promise.  
The command is to abide in Christ. When that is done, we *will* bear fruit. The fruit that God desires. The fruit that only *God* can produce.

But we hear all this talk about fruit – and there is much of it in these verses – and we immediately begin to think about what **I** have to do. What I have to do to please God. I have to sin less. I have to be more holy. I have to do all those things that God wants me to do, and bear the fruit He wants me to bear, *or else* He'll cut me off and throw me into the fire. And so we try. We really do! To clean up our lives. To stay on the straight and narrow path. To *not do* the “*Thou shalt nots*” and *to do* the “*Thou shalt*.” But then one of two things happens: we either become proud of the progress that we've made, and think we're doing pretty good! Or we begin to despair because of our lack of progress; because no matter how hard we try, we just cannot do what God commands. Or, we go back and forth between the two! One day feeling pretty good about yourself, and your holiness, and your progress in the Christian life, and the next day plunged into despair, all that looked so good wiped out so quickly by our sin. But either way, we end up in the same place – apart from Christ. Thinking either that we can do it ourselves (or with just a little spiritual boost from God!), or thinking that it cannot be done at all.

For that's what happens when you focus on the fruit. The fruit becomes your idol, and robs you of your life.

Now that's not to say that producing good fruit isn't important – it most certainly is! Six times producing fruit is mentioned in these verses, with Jesus talking not just about fruit, but His desire for *more* fruit, and much fruit. But it is important to realize that the fruit is not the command here – it is the promise. A promise that is meant to comfort and

encourage us in this life. That as we abide in Christ Jesus and He in us, that we will produce the fruit that is pleasing to our Father in Heaven. For as we heard: ***“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”***

Or in other words, producing fruit is not so much a matter of what you do, but of who you are. So who are you?

Well, I guess you could answer that in a number of ways. You are a man or a woman. You are Irish, German, English, or whatever. You are a professional or a blue collar worker. You are a father or mother, a son or daughter. That’s all true, and more. But to know who you are *truly* is to say: I am a sinner. Not just in what I do, but in what I am. And so that’s the fruit I produce naturally, on my own. Bad fruit, sinful fruit, which is worse than no fruit at all. . . . But when we sinful branches are engrafted onto the **true vine**, the good and holy vine, when He abides in you and you in Him, something happens. You are forgiven. And through that forgiveness, you become something altogether different; something *other* than what you were before – you become a child of God. A **good** branch, bearing the **good** fruits of repentance and faith.

So it was with the Ethiopian eunuch in the reading from Acts. He was many things in his life, but when Philip opened the Scriptures to him and revealed His Saviour to him and then baptized him, he became what he was not before and could never be on his own – a forgiven child of God. A new creation. And so it is with you. Who you are is a child of God – not because of what you have done, but because of what your Saviour has done for you. Because as Philip explained to the Ethiopian, Jesus was the Lamb of God who died for your sins. Because He offered His life in your place. Because it’s not about what *you* do, but what He did **for you**. Because baptized into Him, you died to sin with Him and you rose to life with Him, and you have thus been born again to a new life, as a new branch, on the true vine.

And Jesus, speaking these words of the Holy Gospel to His disciples on the night just before He would be crucified, wants them – and us – to know that this is why this will all happen. He is not here giving His disciples commands to fulfill, but teaching them the significance and reality of what was now taking place. This is what His crucifixion means – **not just death for Him, but life for us.**

And therefore because of who you now are (in Jesus!), you will bear fruit. You will bear fruit because your Heavenly Father will see to it. He is the vinedresser who does not just plant us in our Saviour and His life and then leave us on our own – He continues to care for us there.

And so He feeds us with the body and blood of His Son, that we grow in our faith, be strengthened, and produce the fruit that He desires.

When the challenges and struggles and troubles of this world seek to drag us down, He lifts us up in His strength and peace.

He waters us with the forgiveness of Christ, that we not thirst, but grow healthy and not wither under the heat and oppression of our sin.

When we become wild branches, becoming overconfident and growing out on our own, He prunes us back that we repent and rely on Him, and Him alone.

He ties us and binds us up with His Word of truth, that we grow and produce not when and where and how *we* want, but in accordance with *His* good and gracious will.

And when we are threatened by false or wrong beliefs, or the disease of worldly wisdom seeks to pull us away from Him, His grace and truth keep us in Him and He is us, that we bear good fruit.

And so our Father is pleased – not because we did it all and He didn't have to do anything, but because His love and care, His Word and Sacraments, His grace and forgiveness – because *His* work has produced in us exactly what He wanted. **His fruit.** Not our fruit that we give to Him! Jesus *didn't* say: Produce from *for* Him. But that we *will* produce fruit – His fruit, that He produces through us.

Maybe it doesn't seem that way to you in your life. Maybe you can't see the fruit – but maybe you are looking in the wrong place, or expecting the wrong fruit. You aren't the judge, He is. And so rather than relying on what you can see, **rely on what you hear – on His promise: His promise of fruit.** And those fruits that He has told us He desires to produce in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23) Those things may look small and unimpressive to the world, and maybe even to us, but not to God. These fruits of faith are exactly what He wants to produce in you, and has promised that He would.

Now that doesn't mean that we don't do anything! That we just sit back and let God do everything. No. It means that we have life. A new life, and we get to live that life. That life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and all the ways those things will manifest themselves in our lives. Speaking a word of encouragement and forgiveness when someone is down. Not repaying evil with

evil, but evil with good. Standing up for someone who cannot stand up for themselves. Welcoming the outcast. Loving the unloved. Visiting the lonely. Helping those in need. Speaking of your Saviour, like Philip, when the opportunity arises. Lifting up others in prayer. And how else in your life?

Not that we get credit for any of it! We don't need it. We've already been given everything. No, ***by this our Father is glorified***. We are simply being who we now are. Sons. Children. Branches in the true vine, abiding in Christ Jesus and He in us, through the water of His forgiveness, the Word of His truth, and His the body and blood that feeds and strengthens us. His life in us, and so our life in Him.

For that's the power of Jesus' resurrection. Easter is about forgiveness, absolutely! But it is also about the new life that we have in and through that forgiveness. Or as Luther put it: *where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation*. (Small Catechism, Lord's Supper 11) For the life that your Saviour provided for you and gives to you, your eternal life, doesn't just start when you die – its starts *now*. You're living it in Him, and He in you. That's Jesus' promise, and **the *fruit of His resurrection***.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds steadfast in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.