

YOUR GOAL – GOD’S GLORY.

Easter 5 – April 26/29, 2018

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Dear Christian Friends:

We humans are ambitious creatures. We are always setting goals. Businesses set goals for production and sales. Athletes set goals: higher, faster, stronger. Students set goals for improving their GPA. Dieters set goals for losing weight. And when we get tired of all this achievement, we set the goal of "taking today off and doing absolutely nothing but relax."

All this is good. We need goals. We need a reason to get out of bed in the morning. We need the satisfaction of completing our goals.

But for Christians there is one goal that arches over all other goals. This goal fills our thoughts, words, and actions. This goal surrounds us and influences every moment of every day. In the book of I Corinthians Saint Paul tells us this one central goal for every Christian. He says, **Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**

Jesus says the same thing in our Gospel Lesson. **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing**

yourselves to be my disciples.” Jesus sets our goal. It is to give glory to God by being faithful, productive, disciples of Jesus. That means we do an abundance of good works through faith in Jesus and by the power of Jesus. So, **YOUR GOAL – GOD’S GLORY.**

Now, certainly, Christians do good works. We can set goals for our good works. We can say, “I want to come to church every week. My goal is to read the Bible at least fifteen minutes a day. I want to share God’s Word with at least five acquaintances next week. I plan to give a hundred dollars to a worthy charity.” So, goal setting is good. After all, as a congregation, we are setting the goal of collecting \$175,000 in a special anniversary offering.

But as we set goals to bring glory to God, we need to understand something. You see, most goal setting relies on the goal setter to get the job done. For example, to boost goals for production and profit, businesses streamline the manufacturing process. They improve logistics. They do an advertising blitz. They use their own resources to achieve the goals they set for themselves.

But it works differently for Christians. Jesus says, **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**

When you do good works for God’s glory, the power to do those works does not come from you. It comes from Jesus. Also, for your actions to glorify God, you must do them also through faith in Jesus, and by following the commands and example of Jesus.

Now, this does not mean that you are mindless, heartless, robotic, good work producing machine without any accountability or any desire to glorify God. No, you are a living member of the body of Christ. That’s why Jesus uses the comparison of branch and vine. A branch is alive. A branch takes water and nutrients from the vine and produces fruit.

That's the way it works with you and me. Jesus made you part of himself at your baptism. Now you receive spiritual food from Jesus. That food is the good news that Jesus is your Savior. It's the good news that Jesus died to erase all your sin. It the good news that Jesus came back to life on Easter to give you eternal life in heaven. That spiritual nutrition of the gospel creates and strengthens faith. That faith changes your heart and your attitude. So, when Jesus pumps you full of his grace and love and power, you say, "I want to produce good works. I want to love God with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind. I want to serve and love my neighbor by being helpful, friendly, kind, patient, generous, and forgiving."

And that brings us to the kind of good works that glorify God. Those works are those that help your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers, total strangers, and yes, even your enemies. So, you glorify God when you help your neighbors with their yard work. You glorify God when you clean the house, cook dinner, and do the laundry. Parents glorify God when they change dirty diapers, spend quality time with their children, and yes, even discipline their children. You glorify God at work when you encourage your co-workers instead of competing with them. You glorify God when you forgive that repentant gossip or that repentant thief. You glorify God when you donate to charity, volunteer for community service organizations, or when you simply treat everyone one politely, respectfully, and kindly.

You see, Jesus wants to bless his creation with all good things. Jesus delivers those blessings through you. ***He is the vine. You are the branches.*** So, just like a branch is the channel the vine uses to produce fruit, so also you and I are channels through which God gives his blessings to others.

But there's also something else we need to understand about producing the fruit of good works. Sometimes, Christians judge each other and say, "Well, he must not be a very good Christian. I don't see him doing much to help others. And she never lifts a finger to please anyone but herself."

Now, certainly, if you are lazy, selfish, and not putting your faith to work, you need a strong warning. You need a concerned Christian to drive home to you what Jesus says, **If anyone does not remain in me, (and therefore does**

not produce good works that glorify God), he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. So, yes, we all need this warning against spiritual sloth and a dead faith.

But sometimes your fellow Christian does not appear to produce abundant good works because he or she is struggling. This is because of factors beyond his or her control. To illustrate, perhaps some of you have heard that the 2017 grape harvests in Europe were the lowest in decades. That means less grapes. That means less wine! But the low European grape harvest did not happen because the vines were bad or the branches were bad or the farmers were lazy. No, there was a bad grape harvest because the weather was bad. There were droughts, then floods. Some parts of Europe were too hot. Other parts got early frosts. So, there were external factors causing a low grape harvest.

The same is true for producing good works that glorify God. Sometimes your fellow Christian does not produce abundant good works because Satan is pouring down torrential temptations on him. Sometimes this sinful world is bearing down on your fellow believer with heated persecution or with frosty indifference. So, just like harsh weather can reduce a grape harvest, so also the harsh realities of this sinful world can reduce the good works your fellow believers produce. And when that happens, you do not judge or criticize your fellow Christian. You encourage. You pray. You help. You love, forgive, and support your fellow Christian. And when you do that, that is a good work that brings even more glory to God.

So, set your goal to glorify God by producing the good works of love and service to all those around you. And when you are struggling in your faith or when you produce the sour grapes of sin, then go back to Jesus. Stay with Jesus. He heals you with his love and forgiveness. He strengthens you with his power. He feeds you with Word. Christ and Christ alone makes you a productive branch. To God alone be the glory, now and forever. AMEN.