

YOUR GOAL – GOD’S GLORY. Easter 5 & Confirmation – April 25/28, 2024

John 15:1–8. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he is going to cut off. And he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will bear more fruit. “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I am going to remain in you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, 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 done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you continue to bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples.

Dear Christian Friends:

We humans are ambitious creatures. Businesses set goals for production and sales. Athletes set goals: higher, faster, stronger. Students set goals for improving their GPA. [*And, Jillian, I know that you are a straight “A” student. So you know about setting goals to get good grades.*] Dieters set goals for losing weight. People in debt set goals to pay off their debt. And when we get tired of all this achievement, we set the goal to “take today off. Do absolutely nothing. Relax.”

We need goals. We need a reason to get up in the morning. We need the satisfaction of completing our goals.

But for Christians, one goal arches over all others. This goal fills our thoughts, words, and actions. This goal influences every moment of every day. In First Corinthians Saint Paul tells us this one central goal for every Christian. **Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**

Jesus says the same in our Gospel Lesson. **I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit... My Father is glorified by this: that you continue to bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples.** Jesus sets our goal. It is to give glory to God. We achieve that goal 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, my dear friends, [*and especially you, Jillian, on your confirmation day*], understand this **YOUR GOAL – GOD’S GLORY.**

Now, certainly, Christians do good works. We can even set goals for our good works. We can say, “I will come to church every week. My goal is to read the Bible at least fifteen minutes a day. I will share the good news of Jesus with at least five acquaintances next week. I will give five hundred dollars to a worthy charity.” All those are good things. So, goal setting is good.

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 production and profit, businesses streamline the manufacturing process. They improve logistics. They do an advertising blitz. To achieve the goals they set for themselves, they use their own ideas and their own resources. And they set these goals for their own benefit.

But it works differently for Christians. Jesus says, **A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.**

When you do good works for God’s glory—and you do do them—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 through faith in Jesus. And you can only glorify God by following the commands and example of Jesus.

Now, this does not mean you are mindless, heartless, robot. You are not a good work machine on autopilot. No, you are alive. You are a member of the body of Christ. That’s why Jesus calls himself the vine and you the branch. A branch is alive. A branch takes water and nutrients from the vine. Then the branch produces fruit from the food it receives from the vine.

That's the way it works with you and me. Jesus made you part of himself at your baptism. [*And, Jillian, confirmation is you stating publicly what Jesus did for you at your baptism. Confirmation is your way of saying, "Thank you, Jesus. I promise to use my baptism every day."*] Now, one you are baptized, 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 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."

Those are all examples 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 serve your family. You clean the house, do repairs on your 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, even if they are trying to compete with you. You glorify God when you forgive that repentant gossip or that repentant thief. You glorify God when you donate to charity. You glorify God when you volunteer for community service. You glorify God when you treat everyone with respect and kindness.

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*. A branch is the channel the vine uses to produce fruit. We are branches attached to Jesus. So, 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 make false, superficial judgments about faith and good works. Christians can 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." Or you can look in the mirror and say, "I must not have faith. I don't help other. I don't life a finger to please anyone but myself."

Now, certainly, if you are lazy, selfish, and not putting your faith to work, this is what Jesus says to you: **If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** So, if you are not a growing, fruit-producing branch attached to Christ by faith, your only fate is fire. You know what kind of fire Jesus means.

But sometimes you or your fellow Christian do not appear to produce abundant good works. Maybe you or they are struggling because of circumstances beyond control. To illustrate: consider a farmer. A farmer can be a talented, experienced, and hard-working. But a severe drought can wipe out his crops. A tornado can rip his barns and silos to shreds. A fruit grower can lose an entire harvest with a hard frost at the wrong time.

The same is true for producing good works that glorify God. Sometimes it appears that a Christian is not producing good works. Why not? Well, Satan is pouring down torrential temptations on that poor Christian. Sometimes this sinful world is bearing down on one of Christ's branches with heated persecution or ice-cold indifference. So, just like harsh weather can reduce a harvest, so also the harsh realities of this sinful world can overwhelm even the most faithful believer. Those harsh realities can reduce or even hide the good works you or your fellow believers are actually producing.

When that happens, do not judge or criticize yourself or your fellow Christian. Instead, encourage each other. Pray for one another. Comfort one another. Help, love, forgive, and support one another. And when you do that—when we as a church do that—we are doing good works that bring even more glory to God.

So, my dear Christian friends, [*and especially, you, Jillian,*] set your goal to glorify God. Set your goal to produce 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 feeds and strengthens you with his Word and sacrament. Christ and Christ alone makes you a productive branch that bears much fruit. To God alone be the glory, now and forever. AMEN.