

Roots, Fruits, Weeds and Seeds
John 15:1-8

A wise man once said; "A day without laughter is a wasted day."

Most Korean church worship services are much longer than the worship service at Faith United Methodist Church. One of the things that contribute to the longer worship service in the Korean Christian tradition is the public leading of prayer by the lay leadership.

One time, a Korean church lay elder stood in the pulpit and started his prayer. He started his prayer with the story of the creation of God, and he continued to quote stories of the Bible, of Adam and Eve, of Noah's flood, of Abraham and Isaac, of Moses' delivery of the Israelites from Egypt, and so on, and on. His prayer finally ended one hour later. When after the prayer, he opened his eyes, he found that all the members had left the sanctuary, but two: the pastor and himself.

He asked the pastor, "Where have they gone?" The pastor replied, "They were gone by time you got to the flood of Noah. They got swept way by the flood of your prayer."

The Church calendar indicates that we are now into the time of the year called "Kingdom tide," beginning the last Sunday in August. So, we changed all of the paraments, stoles, and banners that are hung in the sanctuary. They were red until last week, and now, you see that they are green, symbolizing growth in Christ. In this season, children are ready to go back to school. Tomorrow is Labor Day, a national holiday, a kick-off day for a new season: Ready, get set, go—for a productive life!

A productive life is an important life issue. Without fruitful production, labor is weary and tired. But, when we can see that our goals of production in work, or life, are within our sights, our labor becomes exciting rather than tired. In America, we are very conscious of productivity at all levels. Everybody wants to accomplish what one sets out as a goal of production in work, in society. But, have you ever defined what you consider to be a productive life?

More importantly, do you know what God's definition of a productive, fruitful life might be? What does it mean to live a fruitful life? Does it mean success or wealth in material comforts, or simply physical well being, so called?

In the New Testament, three different kinds of fruit are mentioned: the kind we eat—figs and grapes; biological fruit—babies; and spiritual fruit—Christ-like character.

We read Galatians 5:16-23 this morning. Through this scripture reading, we find the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. God wants to see that kind of fruit in our lives.

Jesus shows us our life as a vine. Imagine that image as ourselves. The vine was used as a symbol for Israel, the children of God. Ezekiel 15:1-3, shows us the value of the vine: "Son of man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on?"

The useful value of the vine is nothing at all, in the conventional sense. However, God chooses the vine for God's special care. One hundred twenty eight different plants are mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. The vine is the weakest plant out of the one hundred twenty eight plants. But, God picked the vine as the one God cares for among the many other trees.

Just as a gardener, God gives his whole life to the vine, tending them, feeding them, coaxing them toward fruitfulness. And then, the gardener is pleased by this, that the vine bears much fruit.

In John 15:8, Jesus says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be disciples." The proof that you are a disciple is that you bear fruit. "You did not choose me," Jesus goes on to say, "but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." (v.16)

God wants us to bear fruit—much fruit. This is the productive live. It doesn't mean necessarily a successful life or a wealthy life or even a life of well being. A fruitful life is the significant life.

If we want to lead a fruitful life, we must cultivate some roots. Jesus says, "I am the true vine. Those who abide in me, and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Each branch is dependent on the main stem which is rooted in ground. God says that without roots there will be no fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries, and in a year of drought, never fails to bear fruit." If you don't have good roots, you simply won't bear any fruit.

When I was a boy my father enjoyed planting and tending for all kinds of plants, including a banana tree. A banana tree grows fast. But, unfortunately, we cannot grow it year round in the outdoors in Korea. The climate in Korea is a similar to Wyoming, and banana trees cannot grow outside in the winter.

So, we would have to transplant the banana tree inside the house in the winter. Otherwise, it would freeze. But, if it were grown in Hawaii, a banana tree would be almost indestructible. You can chop it into little pieces, but it will grow back. You can burn it down, but it will grow back. There is only one way to get rid of a banana tree, and that is by uprooting it.

Proverbs 12:3 says that "the righteous cannot be uprooted." Righteous people can stand the heat. They can also endure a time of drought, a long season without rain. In a drought, resources are limited. Everything dries up, and many things die. But the righteous endure.

Have you learned that sometimes in life you have to do without things on which you normally depend? You may be going through a drought right now. Maybe you are doing without emotional support. You are lacking friends or good health, or a job, or financial

stability. Or, you are trying to get by on limited time, energy, or money. How do you handle the dry spells in life? Do you wilt? Do you dry up and blow away?

If you ever visit the Arizona desert, you will find that it is full of different kinds of vegetation. The contrasts have always fascinated me. The dried-up, brittle tumbleweed blows everywhere. Why? Because it has no roots, it can not survive. By contrast, the saguaro cactus bears fruit even in 130-degree weather. Why? Because the saguaro cactus has roots that go out fifty to sixty feet in all directions, it can survive. You have to have roots if you are going to make it through a dry spell.

How do you cultivate roots? A good place to begin might be by memorizing Psalm 1:2-3. The psalmist talks about the stable life, the life that has roots. He says roots are developed by reading and meditating on God's Word. We learn the same thing in the New Testament, in Colossians 2:6-7: Spend time daily reading, meditating on, memorizing, and obeying God's Word. That's how you develop strong spiritual roots, roots that go deep into the soil of God's Word. These roots will enable you to withstand the heat of pressure and the deprivation of drought.

The second thing you need to do to be productive is “weed control” in your life. We can find the problems of weeds in Jesus' the parable of the sower. In this parable there are four kinds of soil, each representing one of the ways we can respond to God's Word. The seeds that fall among weeds stand for those who hear; but the worries and riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke them, and their fruit never ripens. If you want to bear fruit, you have to cultivate good roots and then eliminate the weeds.

What are the weeds in your life? Many different types of weeds can crowd into life and choke the spiritual vitality out of us. Weeds are the concerns and interests that sap our time, energy, and money and prevent us from bearing spiritual fruit.

Jesus mentions three varieties of weeds. Weeds of worry are preoccupation with everyday cares and concerns that causes you to take your eyes off Jesus. Weeds of riches, a fixation with making money to buy more things, may dominate your life so much that you do not have time for the Lord. And weeds of pleasure—chasing “the good life”—can choke out your spiritual growth. It is fine to have a good time, but you need to guard your priorities.

Consider this: how much effort does it take to grow weeds? What do you have to do to cultivate them? Nothing! They grow very well on their own. That is why they are weeds. You have to nurse your tomato plants, but you don't have to do anything to grow dandelions. They will grow- and grow rapidly- with no help from you or anyone else.

Weeds are sign of neglect. When you neglect Bible reading, prayer, and fellowship with other Christians, weeds will grow up and choke your spiritual life, preventing you from bearing fruit.

Lastly, if you are going to be a fruit Christian, you have to trust in God's pruning hand in your life. In John 15:1-2, Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops.”

My first church appointment as a minister was in a rural area in Korea. I still remember that place. There was no running water, no electrical or gas heating system in the houses or the church, and no private telephone lines. But, it was a beautiful place to live. In the garden there were chestnut trees and plum trees. One day in late May, the plum trees bore many plums on every branch. A member of my church, who was an expert gardener, came to see us and saw the plum trees. Then, he brought his loppers to prune the trees, and he was ruthless.

It hurt me just to watch him cut back the plum trees which had already bore fruit, quite large at that. Whack, whack, whack! By the time he was finished, there were only one third of the plums left. Professional pruners will tell you that most people are too timid when it comes to pruning.

But, in that year, my wife Sun and I enjoyed great big, ripe, juicy plums. The next Year, I didn't know what to do with the plum trees, so I left the trees as they were. In middle of June, the rainy season came, bringing thunder storms with heavy wind and rain, which hit the braches of the plum trees. Then, most of the branches, which were bending with the burden of the heavy fruit, were torn off by the wind. I learned the lesson of pruning.

Here is our lesson from the pruning of God. Most of us think that when God prunes us, he cuts off the sinful and the superficial, the deadwood in our lives. He does do that, but he also cuts off stuff that is alive and successful: a business that is going great, a satisfying relationship, good health. Some of that may get whacked off for greater fruitfulness. God often cuts back good things too, in order to make us healthier.

Let's get to the conclusion. What, then, is Jesus' definition of a productive life? Does he mean a successful life? Or, a healthy life? Or, a wealthy life? Or, well being? Not one of these. Jesus said, "My father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." That is his definition of a productive life. We are branches of Jesus. Our goal is to become his disciple. This is the way we are following Jesus.

Most importantly, here is the message that where there fruits are, so are the seeds. The seeds are eternal life. Where there is seed, there is hope. Where there is seed, there is life. Where there is seed, there is the promise of God. The promise of God, the hidden seed in the fruit, is eternal and forever.

Here is a "Hymn of Promise"
In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
un-revealed until its season, something God a lone can see.