**Fruit**

John 15:5-11

Last week we tried to make grapes with sheer concentration and willpower. We still have some seeds if anyone wants to keep trying.

Of course, we all know that holding a grape seed in your hand will not produce a grape. ***Seeds need the proper environment to GERMINATE*** in order to release the potential in each one to become a fruit-bearing plant.

Even if you could get the seed to germinate you know it would take months to grow into a grapevine and **two to seven years to produce grapes**. The quality of those grapes would be determined by the quality of the environment you created to help them grow.

***Today we will have some grapes for you*** as you leave, to celebrate the goodness of God and all He has provided to give us an environment where we can grow closer to Him and more like Him. FRUIT is sweet and wonderful. And this is Jesus’ promise to us:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

Who is the one who bears **MUCH FRUIT**? The one who abides in Jesus. Apart from Jesus we are powerless and our lives will be fruitless. But with Jesus - so many grapes. Big, juicy, delicious grapes.

**Fruit has two meanings in Scripture** - it can mean ***internal fruit*** in terms of growth in character; or it can mean ***external fruit*** in terms of ministry impact. Jesus means both in this chapter, but we will focus on inner fruit this week and outer fruit next week.

Our focus today is:

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
* **Becoming** more like Jesus

The more we grow in our love FOR Jesus the more we will ***BE loving like Jesus***. The first “fruit of the Spirit” is love. How can we become more loving? How can we become more like Jesus?

* ***Don’t you want to see that fruit in your life?*** More love. More generosity. More grace. More giving.
* Don’t you want to see that fruit in ***your marriage***? Two people laying down their lives in service to one another…
* Don’t you want to see that fruit in your ***kids and grandkids***? Compassion. Understanding. Service. Devotion.

How can we create **an environment in our lives** where that kind of fruit grows? Jesus shows us. It’s about loving Him more so we become more like Him. Not a forced external change; a genuine internal growth so that you ARE different, more and more like Jesus.

Verse six shows us this is an **all or nothing reality**.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more

“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” John 15:6

If you abide in Jesus and truly love him, ***you will bear fruit.*** If you don’t see fruit growing in your life of love, joy, peace, patience and other kinds of godliness, it means you are not really connected with Jesus. Because a relationship with Jesus produces that kind of fruit. Knowing Jesus, loving Him, walking with Him turns you into the kind of person who loves others, who is at peace with God and himself; who is patient and understanding; who is learning to serve and sacrifice. In other words, if you are connected with Jesus in a real loving relationship, you WILL see the fruit of change.

If you don’t see yourself changing and growing – or better yet, if the people close to you don’t see you changing and growing – it most likely means you don’t have a true relationship with Jesus. ***You are like this branch that is broken off and withers.***

***Warnings like this are sprinkled into God’s Word to jar us*** – to get our attention; to shake us up. Jesus was very direct. He was not afraid of confrontation. He didn’t beat around the bush.

* He said things like “If you’re not for me, you’re against me.”
* He said, “If you are going to follow me you have to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and actually follow.”
* He said, “Woe to you, hypocrites who say one thing but do another.”
* He said, “If you don’t love me more than father and mother, sister and brother, homes and lands, even your own life, you are not worthy of me.”

Hear what Jesus said in verse six. ***“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”***

Jesus, chill out. Harsh dude. You’re wreckin’ my vibe man. No need to talk about fire and burning stuff. Easy there. Can’t we just get along? Peace, right? (Sorry, you can tell I have this secret desire to be a surfer.)

Is Jesus being harsh here? Is he being insensitive? Let’s be clear. Jesus IS LOVE. Everything he did was perfectly loving. So the example of Jesus shows us that **telling the truth**, even if it seems harsh at times, ***is the MOST LOVING thing we can do***. Withholding the truth, or glossing over it, is NOT loving. Sometimes what we mean by “love” is just niceness and as I tell my wife in certain card games, “it’s not always a game of niceness.”

That’s what Jesus is saying here. I’d rather tell you the truth, even if it offends you, than be the “nice guy” who doesn’t ever ruffle any feathers. Ok, so how can we grow to love Jesus more and become more like Him? ***Three steps to love Jesus more.*** Then two more steps to become more like Jesus. Five steps in total today.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ **Treasure** His teachings

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” John 15:7

***The key to any relationship is WORDS.*** I first knew that I loved Kristin because I loved her voice. I loved talking with her. I loved listening to her. We love our boys by listening to them, hearing how they’re doing, what they’re up to. If you have kids or grandkids these days, sometimes the “words” you get are in the form of a text message so you have to learn to treasure these little interactions called emojis and gifs. It’s weird but you take what you can get.

With God, ***what we have is His Word*** - the Bible. If you don’t love the Bible, don’t kid yourself that you love Jesus. How can you know Jesus apart from the Bible? How can you access His words and teachings? It’s right here, and only right here. Yes, you should pray and spend quiet time with the Lord. But Christianity does not promote silent meditation on nothing that is eastern religion. ***Christian meditation is not EMPTYING our minds, it is FILLING our minds with Scripture.***

If you just sit there with your eyes closed and incense burning and try to contemplate the universe you may or may not experience communion with Jesus. If you DO have a powerful encounter with Jesus it would have been made possible by your PREVIOUS study of Scripture.

Hear me on this. I believe in meditation but the kind of meditation that is helpful is **MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE**. Read a few verses, then read them very slowly, phrase by phrase and let the truth sink in to your heart and mind. The Psalms are great for this. Passages like this in John are great. Paul’s letters often work well. ***Let’s practice with Psalm 23:***

* “The Lord is my shepherd.” Imagine the Good Shepherd being right there with you. But quiet in His loving presence.
* “I shall not want.” Remember that your loving Father knows what you need before you ask. Rest in His loving arms and sovereign care. He will take care of you.
* “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Give thanks for the many blessings in your life. Praise God for how he leads you and even FORCES you to slow down.
* “He leads me beside quiet waters.” Hear the bubbling brook. Feel the cool refreshing water on your toes. Remember that Jesus is the living water. His love, His grace is the primary water that your soul needs.
* “He restores my soul.” Thank God for your salvation. Praise Him for saving a wretch like you. Ask for His ongoing restoration, to keep working in you.
* There’s more in Psalm 23. It’s a good one.

Treasure God’s Word. ***Especially love the teachings of Jesus Himself.*** Abide in Jesus and let his words abide in you. Let them LIVE in you, stay there, grow there. It helps me a lot to MEMORIZE key verses and passages like this one. I’ve been working to memorize John 15:1-11 for several months now. I’m also close to knowing all of John 17. When you memorize verses you can meditate on them at any time - not just when you have the bible in front of you. Like a cow chewing the cud - you can regurgitate a verse and ponder it. Chew and swallow it over and over. Draw out every bit of nutrition. Second, to love Jesus more:

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ Put God **First**

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:8

This is our desire, that God be glorified in us and through us. This is the chief end of man: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. ***This is why God created***, that we would know Him and worship Him because we find Him the most desirable, the most worthy, the most glorious of all things.

How do we glorify God? By bearing the fruit of true change. As people see us changing and growing THEY have an opportunity to praise and honor God for doing such a miraculous work. Our growth in Christ-likeness is the evidence that we really are followers of Jesus.

I realize this is a circular thing.



If you really follow Jesus you will put God first in your life. If you put God first and seek His kingdom above all, ***you will bear the fruit of change*** – you will become more loving, joyful, peaceful, sacrificial and generous. And as you bear the fruit of change your life will more and more bring glory and honor to the God who is changing you. Which will all prove that you truly ARE a follower of Jesus.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ Put God **First**

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:8

So we love Jesus more by treasuring His words, letting them abide in our hearts and minds. And by putting God first.

***Is God your first priority?*** Can you honestly say that you seek the kingdom of Jesus FIRST, in front of every other person and purpose and task?

It’s easy to nod at this one, but are we being honest with ourselves? ***Often God is off to the side***, in a cozy little corner of our lives, not in the center on the throne. He gets bumped off that top, central place of honor by life and work and activity and family and hobbies and streaming shows and bills to pay and the worries of this life, right?

***Is God FIRST in your day?*** That’s a helpful way to put Him first in your life: to start the day by opening the Bible and spending time with the Lord. Whatever causes you to skip your quiet time each day may help you identify what is actually first in your life.

If you want to love Jesus more, you have to prioritize time with Him, in His word. And then you will increasingly experience step three.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ **Experience** His love continually

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” John 15:9

Think about ***how God the Father has loved God the Son***. From eternity past, before God spoke the universe into being, God the Father loved God the Son and their love was so real and tangible it is the very Spirit of their relationship, the third person of the Trinity who eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. I know the Trinity is hard to get our heads around, but God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and they are eternally united in a dance of love and submission and joyful relationship.

Why did God create the world as He did? He was not surprised when Adam and Eve rebelled or when Israel failed, over and over. **God knew**, as soon as He said, “Let there be light,” that the Son of God would have to die to redeem this lost and broken world. But that was the Father’s gift to the Son - a world to save. And it was the Son’s gift back to the Father - a world redeemed. Read John 17. Jesus prays that the Father would glorify Him as He had lived to glorify the Father.

That is how they love each other: ***an unending movement of honor, delight and generosity.*** We can’t really comprehend the nature and interactions of our Triune God, we will need eternity to begin to understand God.

But inexplicably, mysteriously, overwhelmingly, Jesus says this is how He has loved us - in the same way God the Father has loved Him. We are caught up into the Trinitarian love relationship. And Jesus says: Abide there. Right there. In my love. Live there. Dwell there. Remain there. Let God love you - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Experience that love.

That’s what it means to ***“pray without ceasing.”*** That’s what it means to “practice the presence of God,” and to abide. It means you live in the constant awareness of how LOVED you are by God.

This is **what good parents do for their small children**: they create an environment of safety and love so kids grow up with such security and joy. It is so damaging for a child to be abandoned by parents or neglected and removed from their home of origin. The harm that does to their ability to trust other people and make healthy connections can run through their entire life.

But ***when a child feels secure in her parents’ love***; when both Mom and Dad are there for her even when she does something wrong; when boundaries and expectations are clear and consistently enforced, with loving restoration after discipline is administered… the child flourishes as she grows up.

If you grew up in a **broken home**, with parents who divorced or were just too busy with other things, or with serious dysfunction like an abusive Mom or Dad – first, we are so sorry for that experience! And just know that presents a real hardship for you in knowing God as a good and loving Father. You have probably already realized you have trust issues with HUMANS, but also be aware that those trust issues will apply to God as well.

You have to learn that ***God is NOT like your earthly parents***. He is perfectly loving and present and trustworthy and faithful and you are absolutely SAFE in His arms.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ **Treasure** His teachings
	+ Put God **First**
	+ **Experience** His love continually

So here is our first half summary. To bear the fruit of internal change, we first need to love Jesus more. That involves treasuring His word and abiding in it – studying, meditating on, memorizing and discussing His teachings in the Bible. Second, it means putting God first in our lives and hearts. And third, it means abiding in His love – experiencing His faithful, grace-filled, loving presence throughout each day. And as we love Jesus more, we will find His love changing us to become more and more loving, like Him.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Becoming** more like Jesus
	+ **Obey** His commands

“If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” John 15:10

Two steps to become more like Jesus. First, we must obey His commands. Jesus has made it clear in this whole section that **His love language is obedience.** We talk about ***the love languages*** of time, words, service, touch and gifts. Jesus adds one more love language: obedience. He says that’s at the top for Him. Yes, he wants us to spend time with him, listen to his words and speak loving words to him; he wants us to serve him and be with him and give gifts of our time, talent and treasure.

Obedience is the **love language of all parents**. We want our children to obey us because we love them so much. And the sign that they love us back is that they LISTEN and obey. Again, we are talking about GOOD PARENTS here – not those who are harsh and give orders only to indulge themselves. “Get me that remote. Sit down and be quiet. Go to your room.”

Good parents say, “eat your vegetables; brush your teeth; do your homework; read your Bible; show up for dinner; don’t fight with your brother; don’t give attitude to your teachers; tell me about your day…”

We establish rules and expectations for behavior and time management. We correct misbehavior and teach selfish young children to think of others and realize the whole world does not, in fact, revolve around them. And since we are older and are parents, we know that these **“rules” are for their own good**. ***“Because I said so,”*** means, “Trust me that I know better. I’ve been through this a few times.”

This is how it is with God. He knows best of all. He is the ultimate Father. He has given us rules not to hinder our happiness but to unleash it, to maximize our joy and flourishing.

It’s like ***maintenance on your car.*** Do you resent the manufacturer for telling you to change the oil every 3,000 miles? Do you fuss about replacing the transmission fluid or timing belt on a schedule? No! You are thankful that there are schedules for these things and a GOOD MECHANIC keeps you on that schedule because those RULES will keep your car running in an optimal way.

I got a ***1989 Dodge Colt*** from my Grampa for college. Awesome little hatchback. Proposed to Kristin in the back of that car with my guitar and a song that is tragically lost to history. I drove that car for a while then traded it for my Grandma’s Ford Taurus because we needed more space when Seth was born. So the old Colt went to my little sister. She had it for less than a year because she figured the whole “change the oil” thing was a hoax. Cars should be able to keep running without that silly thing called oil. Who needs that?

Well. As we often tell our boys. It works until it doesn’t. Or, as the guy said when he jumped off the bridge: “Ok so far.”

The Dodge Colt’s poor little 4 cylinder engine eventually ran out of oil and seized up for lack of lubrication. And that was the end of that car. Tragic. Still painful for me today.

And it was a hard lesson for my sister to pay attention to things like maintenance schedules. Yes, they are rules that may mess with your schedule - but you ignore them to your own peril.

Notice how Jesus talks about it here. “If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love.” He is saying **THIS IS HOW to abide** in my mind-blowing, overwhelming Trinitarian love: obey. Listen to my commands. Treasure them. Meditate on them. And above all, DO THEM. Hear my words and put them into practice.

And Jesus bases this promise again in His Trinitarian relationship. He says, “This is how I have lived - by keeping my Father’s commandments and thereby abiding in His love.” Remember how Jesus said back in John 5 that ***He couldn’t do ANYTHING on His own***, but only what He saw the Father doing? Jesus lived His entire life in complete submission to the Father’s will – right up to the cross, Jesus surrendered everything saying, “Not my will but yours be done.”

That’s how Jesus remained in the love of the Father. And it’s how we do as well.

***What is the Holy Spirit calling you to do right now?*** The Spirit’s job is to remind you of everything Jesus taught and help you apply it to your life. He’s very good at that job.

* Who is the Lord calling you to love?
* How is He calling you to serve?
* What is He asking you to sacrifice?
* What selfishness or sin is He commanding you to renounce?
* What relationship is He directing you to mend?
* What conversation is He leading you to have?

***The command of Christ boils down to one word: LOVE.*** Our owner’s manual as human beings says two things: love God and love others. That’s what will make your soul hum like a brand new Honda (after the Taurus we got our first Odyssey and realized it’s a whole other level).

***The more we love Jesus the more we will become like Him*** - become more LOVING. More gracious. More generous. More sacrificial. More faithful. More honest. That’s what His commands are for: to help us along that path. To help create the environment in our lives where these good fruits can mature. One more step to becoming more like Jesus.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Becoming** more like Jesus
	+ **Overflow** with love and joy

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” John 15:11

Remember Jesus said in John 10 - “the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that you may have LIFE and have it abundantly.” His desire for the whole world is JOY. Overflowing, never-ending JOY.

But Jesus knows there is **only one place to find that kind of joy: in Him**. In a relationship with Him. The thief, the devil, will lead us to every other place in search of that joy our souls long for. Sinful places - sure. But also morally neutral places that are good and fine in themselves but simply cannot bear the weight of our worship and devotion. Things like career and family and marriage and children and vacations and hobbies. Those are all good blessings God sprinkles into our lives.

***And the BEST things in life are the ones we are most likely to idolize.*** Our most loving relationships especially. A bad relationship won’t tempt you to put it first, to worship it. A good one will. C.S. Lewis expressed this in the four loves and in a Grief Observed as he processed the death of his wife, Joy.

“Love begins to be a demon the moment he begins to be a god… Every human love, at its height, has a tendency to claim for itself a divine authority.” C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

***What? Love can be a demon?*** An idol? A false god? Of course! It’s the most likely thing to be that. We see it in young people as clear as day. That first crush – the heights of bliss, the most crushing despair when it ends. You can tell young people up one side and down the other, “Don’t get too attached; be careful here.” They won’t listen to you any more than you listened when people tried to tell you. “The heart wants what the heart wants.” And what the human heart wants is called idols. But Jesus offers us the real thing.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Becoming** more like Jesus
	+ **Overflow** with love and joy

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” John 15:11

There’s a beautiful play on words here in the phrase, ***“That my joy may be in you.”*** Does that mean that Jesus’ own joy - he Trinitarian, overflowing delight in the Father’s love - would be in us? Or that WE would BE His joy? Yes. Both.

You and I - redeemed sinners - are the product of Jesus’ saving work. **We are the gift** the Father gave the Son and the Son gives back to the Father, made whole. We are the great joy of the Lord Jesus. We are His 6,000 year masterpiece. You are. Jesus rejoices IN YOU. He celebrates YOU.

***He is making you into something truly glorious.*** And He won’t finish until that work is absolutely perfect. That’s why Jesus is such a relentless artist. He isn’t content with half measures. He will make you beautiful. Brush stroke by brush stroke. Crash of the chisel, swing of the hammer.

***His JOY is in YOU.***

And also, the overflowing, never-ending all surpassing joy of the Godhead is in you. That little detail. The fountain of living water you can drink and never thirst again - is in you, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

So here is our summary for today.

**The Fruit of Change:**

* **Loving** Jesus more
	+ **Treasure** His teachings
	+ Put God **First**
	+ **Experience** His love continually
* **Becoming** more like Jesus
	+ **Obey** His commands
	+ **Overflow** with love and joy

This is the ***INTERNAL change*** Jesus is working in us. Come back next week for the EXTERNAL change, the visible fruit of His transforming work in us.

If we abide in Jesus, ***we WILL bear much fruit***. First, that fruit is inside us - our hearts are changing, more and more into the image of Jesus as we see His face. We love Jesus more and we become more like Him. Five steps to create the best environment for this fruit to develop:

1. First, treasure the words of Jesus. Let His teachings abide in you. Study God’s Word. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Discuss it. Love it.
2. Second, put God first. Prioritize Jesus in your schedule. Make Jesus your first meeting of the day. Don’t let anything else take first place in your heart and life.
3. Third, daily experience the love of Christ. Don’t just think about the gospel, experience it. Revel in it. Abide in the Trinitarian love to which you are continually invited.
4. Fourth, obey the commands of Christ. They are not there to limit your joy but to unleash it; to maximize your fruitfulness and flourishing. The Bible is our user’s manual for human beings.
5. Finally, overflow with the love and joy of Jesus. He delights in you as His great masterpiece. And he places His own limitless joy into your heart. Live in that overflow.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” John 15:9

There is your homework. ***Memorize that verse.*** Meditate on it today and through the week. Text it to yourself. Write it out and put it on your dashboard and your bathroom mirror.

Trinitarian love. Perfect. Unending. Infinite. Joyful. That’s how loved you are. Abide in it.

Let’s pray.

***GRAPES ON THE WAY OUT - ramekins w/ 3 grapes each, on trays for the ushers***

(Tom will set up)