



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Essential Connectivity

John 15:1-8

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It is estimated that last year there were over a billion internet users. These billion people logged on at least once a week, making them part of the internet community. What it means to be connected has an ever-changing meaning in our world. This week I have received e-mails, and been on facebook and twitter. I have made phone calls and answered e-mail from my blackberry. I have also received and sent text messages. And of course I have made and received phone calls at my home and at the church office. I have sent and received mail through the U.S. Postal Service. I have met for lunch with friends and had dinner with family. I have spent several hours face to face with church members and strangers discussing issues both personal and corporate. I have been connected this week.

We go to great extremes these days to stay connected, but what we all know is that the essential connectivity we desire and need in life is connectivity to God. Sadly, too many times this connection is something that remains a low priority and is easily placed to the side, when the demands of everything else come into our lives.

I believe that one of the great failures of the church today is that we have failed to remind each other how essential our daily connectivity to God is for a disciple. Jesus says it plainly to us here in John 15 when he reminds us that He is the vine and we are the branches; without him or apart from him we can do nothing.

In chapter 14 of John, Jesus has reminded the disciples that He and the Father are one. Jesus reminds us that when we have seen Him, we have seen the Father. Jesus abides in the Father and the Father abides in Jesus. Jesus also promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will enable the Spirit of Jesus to live in our lives. The Holy Spirit will remind us of what Jesus has spoken and done. Jesus gives us the model for abiding or connectivity with the picture of the Trinity. The Trinity is this perfect picture of abiding with one another. It is complete fulfillment of connection.

The amazing part of the picture of the Trinity then is that we are invited into this connectivity. Jesus said in John 14:20 that on the day the Spirit comes into our lives, we will realize that He is in the Father and you and I are in Jesus and that Jesus is in us. What a connection!

Yet, I would imagine that most of us read these words and say, "They sound interesting – even promising, but many of us might admit that we do not feel like we live life in connection with God. Too many times our relationship with God seems strained, distant, and sometimes non-existent. What we need is to rediscover this essential connectivity.

Our first step is to realize our place in the connection. The other day I was plugging something in outside with two extension cords to run from the porch on the house to the item I was plugging in across the yard. Each part of the connection was important; everything had to fit just right; the plugs and the outlets had to match. What was important in this connectivity? The outlet was important, as well as the cords had to be connected and working properly. Finally, the item being connected needed to work properly. If anything did not work properly, then the item would not work and I could not use it to do my yard work.

It is the same way in the essential connectivity with God: each part of the connection is important. It is also important that we discover again our role in the connection.

Jesus tells us that He is the vine and the Father is the gardener. Jesus went on to tell us that we are the branches. What are the roles of God the Father, Jesus, and us in this essential connectivity? Jesus says, "I am the true vine." In verse 5 Jesus repeats this statement. This is one of those identifying statements of Jesus. Jesus would say, "I am the light", "I am the way", "I am the living water" "I am the life", and here He said "I am the vine."

The vine was not a new connotation to the disciples. Throughout the Old Testament, we have the image of the vine and the vinedresser, or the gardener. In the Old Testament, the vine or the vineyard was Israel, and God was the gardener or caretaker. Many times when Israel was pictured as the vine in the Old Testament, it was to reveal how Israel had been rebellious. The vineyard was full of wild vines or was unproductive; thus, it had to be pruned and tended to by God. Jesus used this picture to describe himself as the vine. There is a new idea here: we are not the vine – Jesus is the vine; we are the branches which are dependent upon the vine: Jesus. Jesus says, “I am the true vine.”

The vine is the essential life-giving part of this picture. It is the vine that brings nutrients and nourishment to the branches, which in turn produce the fruit. Nothing lives in the vineyard without the vine. Jesus reminds us that he is the true vine. Jesus is seemingly reminding us that there are many things in this world that claim to give us life.

We have seen a great trend in advertising in recent years as products have moved from making claims about what they really do to making claims about what they can do for us, emotionally and culturally. Who would have ever thought that laundry detergent could not only get our clothes clean but also save the environment and give us a peace of mind that surpasses all understanding? Who would have ever thought that a cold drink – soft or alcoholic – could provide not only a thirst-quenching experience but create universal harmony or a moment that we would conclude “It gets no better than this. This moment is the end of all desires. I can die after this moment because there is nothing greater in life than to experience this cold drink.” In recent years, it seems that every product makes us better looking and more desirable to the opposite sex. However, we know deep down inside that products are not our vine.

Yet, there are other things that might not be quite as easy to identify: our work, hobbies and even our families and friends bring meaning and zest to our living. Jesus wants us to remember that in the final analysis, the only one who can really give us a life that cannot be taken away and is sustainable and full is him – Jesus is the true vine.

In the same way, God is the gardener. God the Father, according to Jesus, is actively involved in creating a connection with us through Jesus that produces fruit in our lives. Jesus tells us that God the Father is personally involved in creating fruit. Now we know that Jesus and the Father are abiding as one; so, anything that Jesus does, He is doing through and with the Father. Thus, Jesus’ life-giving as the vine is also a work of the Fa-

ther. However, Jesus tells us that God is even more personally involved in our lives and this connection: He is making sure that the connection is performing as it should.

God’s role, in this matter in particular, is described as cutting away all the branches that do not bear fruit and pruning the ones that do bear fruit, so that they will bear more fruit. Now we do not have time today to delve into this image to the fullest, but the question of whether God cuts away branches that do not bear fruit is an image to some of people losing salvation, while to others it is a picture of God cutting away the pretenders for another time. Those are not our focus at this time. Rather, the focus I want us to have is that God desires us to bear fruit in our lives. God wants what is the best for our lives. God desires to create opportunities in our lives where the very life of God is experienced by you and me.

Thus, God is at work. The work of the gardener is never over – it is a daily activity, for the vine and the branches have to be tended to. If the vineyard is just left to itself, the wild shoots and the dead branches will ultimately doom the whole vineyard. God loves us too much to just let us be. We, therefore, have this image of God actively involved in our lives, cutting away that which is dead so it does not kill us, and He is cutting away from our lives that which hinders us from experiencing His best. The point is that fruit bearing is not solely our activity. On the contrary, it is the result of the true vine and the active personal nature of God in our lives.

In this relationship, we are told that we are the branches. Notice something we are not in this connection: the fruit; instead, we are the branches. Just as the vine brings life to us, we bring life to others and to our world. As the branches, we are the conduit for the fruit. The point is that connection is not what God can do for us but what God can do through us. One writer says it this way: “God’s grace and love always come to us on their way to someone else.” Jesus reminds us in verse 8 that us bearing fruit is to show the glory of God. Jesus is the true vine, God the Father is the active personal gardener, and we are the branches through which God is going to do His work. It is important to know our place in the connection.

Jesus also reminds us of the importance of staying connected to him. In verses 4-5 Jesus states, “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.” Staying connected to the vine is the key, because

when we do not stay connected, something happens to us: we forget that we are fruit bearers and not fruit makers. We live in a culture that calls us to work just a little harder. We are told that we can make it happen. Everything depends on our effort and our abilities. We live among people who are workaholics, and I know I am the pot calling the kettle black. We celebrate success and we all love hearing the stories of the American dream and the one who creates their own success. Soon, if we are not careful, we begin to believe our own lies. We begin to believe that we are the fruit makers. We begin to believe that everything we “own” belongs to us, it is the direct result of our efforts, and we deserve it all. We begin to think that we really are the fruit makers.

However, in some ways we are fruit makers. In our own efforts and abilities we can produce certain outcomes. We can work hard, make money, and buy things. We can work hard on relationships and make friends. By our own efforts, we can produce many things in our lives, but can we produce the kind of fruit that God promises in our lives? Jesus says “No.” In fact, the kind of fruit that God wants in our lives cannot be produced by us. That is what Jesus means when he says, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” We know that we can do things apart from Jesus – people do things every-day apart from Him. But what they do does not produce the God-like life that we desire. The fruit that we really desire in our lives and the fruit that God wants cannot be produced by us.

This is sometimes hard to grasp. Just what does God want to produce in our lives? Those who preach the success gospel would want us to believe that God wants us to be wealthy, healthy and wise. Those who preach the social gospel would suggest that God want us to be poor, destitute and humble. Those who preach the culture gospel would suggest that what God wants for us is that we are relevant to every generation. The truth is that all of these three can be produced without God. We can be wealthy, healthy and wise without God being a part of our lives; we can be poor and destitute and help others without God being the reason for our choices; and we can even be culturally relevant and compromise the gospel to the place where God is not involved. What does God really want to produce in our lives?

The Apostle Paul reminds us what the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s work are in our lives in Galatians 5:22.

You have heard this list before, but listen to it again in light of God’s work and Jesus’ connection to us. Paul reminds us the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. In other words, these are the gifts of grace. These are the qualities of life which do not come by our efforts but come by being connected to the true vine, Jesus. These qualities are what God wants for our lives. No matter what we do, what we have, where we live and what we might accomplish, what matters is whether we love others. Do we have a joy and peace in situations? Are we patient and kind with others? Is there a faithfulness and goodness as part of our character? Do we practice gentleness and self-control? These fruits of the Spirit are only possible when we are connected with Jesus.



***“... Connection  
is not what  
God can do  
for us but  
what God  
can do  
through us.”***

What is amazing about this list is that they are the very things that are needed no matter the circumstances of our lives. Whether we are poor or rich, healthy or sick, celebrating or grieving, these fruits of the spirit grant to us and to others the presence of God. Staying connected is the key.

How do we stay connected? I think many times we come to this “how to” part of a sermon and think there must be something we have not heard of before. There must be a new method to be a Christian and experience God. What I want to tell you is that the way we connect to God has never really changed. We do not need new methods, another seminar, or even another book by an emerging popular

preacher. There are three activities which are mentioned in our text that give us insight into how we stay connected. They may not sound exciting or new, but they work and they have always worked because they are the methods Jesus teaches.

The first is found in the comment by Jesus in verse 3, “You are already clean.” Now Jesus is putting to rest the nature of the true disciples. The disciples do not need to worry about whether they are going to be cut off, that is for those who were never a part of vine. Therefore, those who remain in the vine and stay connected have been cleaned by the Word. Jesus had already told them that the Holy Spirit would remind them of his words. In verse 7, we are to remain in him and his words in us. One of the ways we stay connected is to remain in the words of Jesus. Reading the Bible, reflecting on the words of Jesus, and making them a part of our living and confessing is one of the ways we remain in

Jesus. We need to make reading the Bible a priority. We need to set aside time to meditate on the words of Jesus – I mean, give them thought and application; let the Holy Spirit teach us through the words of Jesus.

A second activity is the pruning activity. There is the sense of cutting away those things in our lives that are a hindrance to us. When we begin to make Jesus' words a part of our lives, something quickly becomes evident to us: we need to change. We need to see this as the pruning effect. Because God loves us, God will convict us of certain things in our lives which must be put to the side and left behind. Sometimes we think that these moments occur because God does not care about us or want us to be happy, but just the opposite is true. Jesus has already told us that God is personally involved in producing the things in life that matter now and for eternity. Be willing to let go of those things, those attitudes, those activities, those sins that hinder us from bearing fruit.

The final act of being connected is abiding. The meaning of this word suggests an act that is intentional and yet unintentional at the same time. Let me explain. To stay connected we must abide in the word and in Christ, which means that at first we are going to have to be intentional in praying, reading the Bible, and keeping our minds on the things of God. However, as we practice abiding in our lives, something happens to us. We begin to realize that we are thinking and acting like God intends and many times without giving it thought. What has happened is that God's work is being per-

formed in our lives, and all of a sudden, we realize we are developing the mind of Christ and the heart of God.

A cartoon in the "Cathy" series in the newspapers has Cathy's father meeting her at the airport. "Are you sure Irving was picking you up, Cathy?" Cathy responds,

Who knows? Once I waited down here for half an hour while he was waiting on the upper level. Once he went in to meet me at the gate and it took us half an hour to find each other. Once he waited for 45 minutes at the wrong airline. Once I got the dates mixed up, and he spent two hours paging me while I was in a different city. We never run out of ways to miss each other.

Likewise, we never run out of reasons of why we are disconnected from God. I want to encourage you today to find reasons to be connected to God.

We must stay connected because we are not the vine; we are merely the branches. We must stay connected because that which we produce in our lives on our own will ultimately fail us, but the fruits of the Spirit give us and those around us life. We must stay connected because it is the way God transforms our lives and others' lives with the things that matter. This week, we will find many ways to be connected in our technology-driven culture.

Would you decide this week is the week you are going to connect to God? It really is our essential connection. ❁

