**Acts 8:26-40 (ESV)**

**26** Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. **27** And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship **28** and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. **29** And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” **30** So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” **31** And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. **33** In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” **34** And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. **36** And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” **37**  **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**1 John 4:1-11 (ESV)**

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. **2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. **4** Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. **5**  They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. **6** We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. **7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8**  Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

**John 15:1-8 (ESV)**

 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **2**  Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **4**  Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** 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. **6** 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. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8**  By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

**“Connected To Christ”**

 “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:4) Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Savior. Amen. Our world today is interconnected in every way. Stocks rise and fall based upon the pulse of what seems good and bad in the global markets. When leaders from North and South Korea step across each other’s borders this gesture of peace makes international news. The internet is probably the most evident factor that has changed how we connect on a day-to-day basis. If there is no cell reception or Wi-Fi signal, people feel like they are cut off from life itself, which of course is the farthest from the truth.

 So if connections matter today, why do things at the most basic level seem disconnected? If a husband and wife have marital strife you just have to ask, “How often do we spend time with each other?” If parents do not show a united front toward their kids, what do you expect will happen? If Church members never see each other, how will you ever care for one another? Without continued connection, there is no way to build or sustain relationships. God knows about connections for He designed life to be this way. Yet, the fall of sinful humanity severed our connection from God. No wonder Jesus as the Son of the Father reestablished what we need declaring, **“**I am the vine; you are the branches.” Being connected to Christ and only Him makes His disciples to be fruitful branches.

1. **The true vine is what counts above all.**
2. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus reminded the disciples of the connection He had.
* He said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”
* Israel connected to God long ago through prophets sent like Moses, Elijah, and others.
* Yet, Jesus had a unique connection to the Father, being the true vine meant He was His one and only Son.
* By death on the cross God proved the sacrifice of His Son restored the connection of life for sinners when Jesus rose on the 3rd day.
1. No other vine is able to justify any before God other than Jesus.
* St. John know the tangled mess of life saying, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...”
* Other vines might connect to works and the Law for life, but the Gospel promises Jesus does not wither away for sinners.
* The true vine delivers life as a gift by faith in Christ and what made Ethiopian eunuch ask, “Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”
* Baptism put us into Christ’s death to rise justified by Him who says, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”
1. **The warning for branches also comes from the true vine.**
2. Since the Father is the vinedresser, He judges the branches.
* Jesus told His disciples, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he (The Father) takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”
* One judgment is more severe than the other based on the branches connection to the vine.
* The first has no fruit, because it is cut off completely, dead to the life that comes only by faith in Christ.
* The second are those branches that still get pruned by God in some way, but not for the purpose of destruction.
1. Jesus give the answer to His warning about 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.”
* To abide means to remain with Jesus, He invites any into that daily life of repentance and faith in Him as Savior and Lord.
* What withers and faces the fire are dead branches that deny how the true vine is Christ who comes now by His Word and Sacrament.
* Yet, branches in the vine even receives pruning by trials and crosses, which our Father wills for growth that turns us back to Christ.
1. **The fruitfulness of branches from the true vine is what gives glory to the Father.**
2. Jesus alone glorified His Father by the cross, but those connected to Him He uses to honor the Father.
* The purpose of branches is to bear fruit, which means followers of Christ give glory to God in their lives.
* Of course, the greatest glory few notice, but the Father sees it for Jesus says, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).
* Likewise, the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing over what God did for Him by baptism into Christ, which was a fruitful witness.
* Since Christ is the vine giving forgiveness, the branches are not disconnected, but bound together by the vine and so St. John states, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”
1. Rather than counting out the fruit, consider above of all the faithfulness of the vine.
* Jesus already promises by abiding in Him, “He it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
* If there is much fruit, it always goes back to what Jesus says and does for the glory of the Father is to make known His Son.
* Plenty of changes in life shake up the branches, but Christ as the vine says, “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
* Branches have fruitful prayer, but our wishes can never be apart from Christ, since He died for us we trust God’s will is good.

 If connectedness counts in life, a world that tries to redefine connections as God ordained them is in danger of losing them. Left to ourselves we are dead branches, but Easter declares a true vine able to nourish the whole church and each of the baptized with hope, life, and peace. Death could not sever this vine that stretches beyond our works and the laws demands. And faith receives this abundance of the Gospel today by God’s Word and Sacrament. Being connected to Christ and only Him makes His disciples to be fruitful branches. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts in minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.