

“Dead in the Water” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 5 April 28, 2024

- I. **John 15:5** – “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.”
- II. **I read about a pastor who was approached by a stranger.**
 - a. The man walked up to him and said, “Hi pastor, do you remember me?”
 - i. I guess nearly ten years before, this young man had attended some of the pastor’s church services.
 - ii. The young man was at that time dealing with all kinds of life troubles – from possible jail time because of unpaid taxes, alcohol dependence... a troubled marriage and family... his life was a total mess.
 - iii. So the man extended his hand and said, “I just want to thank you, because you preached a sermon one Sunday that God used to turn my life around....By God’s grace, everything is so much better today.”
 - iv. After the pastor got to his office, he dug out the sermon that had been so important to the young man.
 1. He normally wrote a few notes on his sermons the day after about how he felt things went.
 2. On the margins it said, “Dead in the water! No one listened! A waste of time!”¹
 - v. No, hearing the Word of God (which never returns empty or void, Isaiah 55:11), along with abiding in Jesus as the Vine is never “dead in the water” – unless of course it means the old Adam.
 - b. It’s no coincidence that today’s reading in Acts is about Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch – because our connection to Jesus as the Vine starts at baptism.
 - i. The moment the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized in the water combined with God’s Word... the old Adam was drowned... the old Adam was dead in the water.
 - ii. People may say... not much happened there... how can water do such great things?
 1. Well, Martin Luther says in the Small Catechism, “Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this Word of God in the water.”
 2. So what does this baptism with water mean?
 - a. Again the Small Catechism says, “It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

- b. That's why Paul writes in Romans 6, "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:4).²
 - iii. The old Adam is dead in the water.
 - c. The new Adam rises up and is grafted or connected to the Vine.
- III. **Today, Jesus uses a grapevine to help us see our connection with Him.**
 - a. He was the Good Shepherd last week, and now the Vine to which we are connected... so that we can "bear much fruit".
 - b. Not many of us are familiar with vineyards and grape vines, but Jesus is talking to people who probably were.
 - i. The disciples who are hearing Jesus say these things understand the imagery – they know what happens because grapes are grown all around them.
 - ii. You see, grapes are started from a vine rather than a seed, and the vines can make or break the quality of the fruit.
 - iii. Vineyards plant a vine, and it can take several years for it produce grapes.
 - iv. But as a part of the process, they have to be vigilant to cut back any dead or dying branches, and even pruning back those that cut down on sunlight because too much shade causes grapes to get disease and mold.
 - v. The vines, as they get established, go very deep into the ground so they don't have to be watered too much – the vine's job is to sustain life giving sustenance to the branches which produce fruit.
 - c. A vinedresser is someone who goes in and cuts back the branches so they produce more fruit that tastes better.
 - i. Jesus says that the Father is the one who cuts back the dead, useless limbs that hold us back... He takes away things that might cause our fruit to become diseased or moldy... rotten.
 - ii. God tends to us and helps us to shed the parts that are bad... the parts that produce nothing... the parts that are dead.
 - 1. Yes, He lops off those parts that are "dead in the water".
 - 2. Our baptisms assure us that old Adam and the broken, sinful parts are drowned each day as we are forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - d. Baptism and faith graft us to Jesus... our Vine.
- IV. **Yet, we don't always trust in the Vine, do we?**
 - a. Many times, we trust in the things of the world – money, medicine, people – which can slowly break our connection with Jesus as our hearts become hardened.

- b. It's not like it happens overnight.... But when we stop reading our bibles, attending worship, praying, and spending time with other Christians... and slowly we become detached and produce nothing.
- c. I have said this many times before, but when you come to worship, you are fed a spiritual food that you need.
 - i. Just like when you eat a meal, or you have mental stimulation for your mind, or you go to the gym and exercise... your spiritual self needs sustenance and development too.
 - ii. No branch survives when it is not connected to its vine, or trunk... it needs the life that comes from the source.
 - iii. Some of us know the feeling of walking away from church and God for a time... and we begin to wilt and dry up spiritually.
 - iv. Yet, Jesus tells us to abide in Him... trust in Him alone, and we will always have the most important thing – grace.

V. **The point is not that we have lots of fruit growing on us...**

- a. The main point is that we are connected to Jesus, therefore we will grow fruit because of Him.
- b. Jesus is telling us that we depend on Him completely – because there is no other source of forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- c. When He says, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you,” in verse 3, He is using another pruning word, meaning that we are pruned or cleaned by the Word of God.
- d. Yes, the Word of God does the work.
 - i. The Word that is preached – just like the young man whose life turned around...
 - ii. The Word that combines with the water to drown the old Adam...
 - iii. The Word that combines with bread and wine to become a source of nutrients and strength – right from the Vine Himself!
 - iv. The Word of God that promises forgiveness of our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus...

VI. **Jesus the Vine is our source for an abundance of fruit.**

- a. We cannot produce anything good without Him...
- b. The fruit that comes from us by being connected to Jesus comes in many different forms... but what it really means is what we are doing to live out our baptismal life.
- c. I am baptized, and I am grafted into Jesus... now my life reflects Him.
 - i. When I get up, I pray that He will use me as a servant.
 - ii. When I see things pop up through the day, I think about what Jesus might do in this situation.
 - iii. When I go to bed, I look back on my day and thank God for His work in my life, and if I have not done His will, that I would be forgiven.

d. Our old Adam is dead in the waters of baptism, and now a bumper crop will be produced as the Lord works through us to bring about His will in the world... all because... we are connected to the Vine.

¹ Source: *Hugh Litchfield, Visualizing the Sermon: Preaching Without Notes (CSS Publishing, 1996)*

² Luther. (2017). *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (p. 24). Concordia Publishing House.