

Order of Worship for January 6th, 2013, title, “Bearing Well”, text, John 15:1-11 (communion)

Opening Song:

Invocation:

Welcome and Announcements:

Dedication of 2013 Church Officers

Worship Theme: Praising God that He enables us to be fruitful for Him

Sunday Evening in the Word
5:00 pm to 7:30 pm in the Library
Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:1-4,
“Disciplines of a Holy Heart: Giving”

Opening Song:

“To God Be the Glory” Song # 56

Invocation: 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 & 14-22

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: 2013 Church Officer Installation

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Our God” Overhead

Offering and Offertory:

“All Creatures of Our God and King”
Caleb Bronson and Ron Wolcott

Message: “Bearing Well” John 15:1-15
Pastor John Bronson

The Lord’s Supper

Coming to the Table
“I Surrender All” Song # 596
Invitation to the Supper and Prayers of
Consecration and Confession
Distribution of the Elements

Closing Song:

“Amazing Love” Song # 351

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word:

5:30-7 pm in the Library: Sermon on the Mount,
Matthew 6:1-4, “Disciplines of a Holy Heart: Giving”

“The Prayer Closet”

January 6, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

Joel and Virginia Cook, AWANA Missionaries for Northern California and Northern Nevada: the Spirit will impart a fresh love for clubs and churches and a fresh vision for the work to be done; the Lord will remind them of His perfect faithfulness that all their needs will be satisfied

President Obama: the Spirit will open his mind to God’s own perspective and understanding of the needs of the nation; the Lord will keep him away from both danger and folly; the Spirit will instruct him in the way of truth

OCS: the Lord will enable the returning faculty and students to quickly be up to speed in their classes and studies; the Lord will instill a spirit of joy and thanksgiving amongst the students and families; the reputation of the school excellence will reach into many homes and hearts in our community

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Al Billington (Paradise Police Department): for safety and well being in the department; that his leg continue to heal well

Young Adult of the Week: Miles Kinnamont at Berea College, Kentucky (son of Kent and Mami): that he does well in this next semester; that work, school and extra curricular activities balance well without too much stress

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Carol Bernerd, Bob Boettcher, Ellen McNabb, Randy Bowen, Volker Ladendorf, LaVerne Lee, Dick & Jane Miller, Phil Peterson

(please call the office to request updates to this list)

A key statement from [the message] last week was this: “Remember that believing something is to know it is true and then organize your life on the basis of that truth.” If we believe that God answers prayer, then we should organize our lives so we can pray. It is as simple as that. If we believe that Jesus wants us to live according to His Word, then we organize our lives so we have opportunity to read and know the Word. It is as simple as that, and yet what a challenge that often can be.

Today the message is “Bearing Well.” It comes from probably one of the best known of all the metaphors of the Christian life that we find in the New Testament. That is from John 15:1-11 and is the metaphor of the vine and the branches. Join with me, opening your scriptures to John 15:1-11 and I will begin reading at v. 1.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I love you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.”

This is one of the great metaphors, the great pictures of the Christian life. It is a very simple picture in some ways. There are three active agents in this particular presentation. The active agents are the Father, and the Father desires that we would have abundant fruit. The second is Jesus; He is the vine, and the objective of the vine is that we would be vigorously alive. Thirdly there are the branches. I should have you all wave, for you are the branches. The objectives, the purpose of the branch is to bear, not just fruit, [but] abundant fruit. That is how Jesus characterizes the three active agents in this metaphor.

That is obvious. Almost anybody who knows this passage would be able to lift up those three observations. Perhaps a little less obvious, at least not as quickly gravitated to by us is the other statement, that the Father not only prunes branches, but He removes branches that don’t bear fruit. Jesus does not say, He does not here describe, how this happens. He doesn’t tell us what it looks like in practical terms, but I think it is worth thinking about. We might want to ask ourselves, “What is the removal process by which God carries out not just the pruning of a bearing branch, but the elimination of a fruitless branch? Does it mean that that particular branch, that person loses their salvation because they have lost contact with the life giving vine?” We know that whoever is separated from the vine has no continuing source of life.

It is interesting and I encourage you to turn to Romans 11:17-21. You probably sense by now the gravity of this particular topic. So looking at these verses is essential for us to keep our bearings straight. God deals with us in utter and total seriousness. What is the measure of God’s sobriety of spirit in dealing with us? The measure of the sobriety of God in dealing with us is the death of His Son on the Cross! The price that you and have had paid for us that we might partake of these elements, that we might be a true and living part of the body of Christ, the price is the death of Jesus. So this is not a light matter. It is at the core and the heart of the purposes of God in dealing with us. This is what Paul says:

“But if some of the branches were broken off and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ That is true. They were broken off because of

their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.”

For those of us – I certainly include myself – who are persuaded of the doctrine of eternal security, these are troublesome verses. We need to listen to them carefully. Here is the bottom line: the bottom line is, regardless of your theological position, no matter what your understanding of the teaching of the doctrines are, the presence or absence of faith is a non-negotiable minimum. It is an utter and total waste of time for a faithless [person] to say, “But I once confessed Christ, therefore I must be saved.” As the Father walks through the vineyard and examines the branches, He is not interested in the branch that says, “See, here I am.” He is interested in the branches that are loaded with fruit, because the branches don’t have any, Jesus says they are cut off, and it doesn’t make any difference what your doctrine is. The only difference is whether or not you have faith.

You might recall a stunning moment in the gospels when Jesus came up to a man whose son was demon possessed. He desired to have his son saved. Jesus said, “Do you have faith?” The man said, “I have faith; help my unbelief.” I believe; but oh there is within me a chasm, a river, a voice of doubt, question, fear. If that is you; if you as you contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ, as you think about the life of faith, as you let the light of God’s truth shine upon the memories you have of where you have been and what you have done: if you under those circumstances begin to tremble, and you say to yourself, “There is not much evidence; I don’t know how to count the fruit. I tremble with fear!” Then the answer for you is to say, “I believe; help me.” For is that not the essence of what Paul means when he says we are not to be proud, but we are to stand in awe, in awe of a God Who loves us even when we bare almost no fruit? Such are the measures of God’s grace, and we should cling to them and hold them close to us so that we do not let the voice of the Accuser slip between us and the Savior Who loves us, so that we become deaf to Christ’s voice. We want instead to be continually encouraged in faith and therefore ask the Lord always, “Please open my ears to hear what Your Word has to say; let my heart be sensitive and responsive to Your Spirit. Do not let guilt silence in me the voice of Your Spirit. I believe I am saved; please save me.”

If you go on down in John 15, at the third verse we run into something a little unexpected. Jesus says, “Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” Now in all honesty though we have become very familiar with the passage and cease to think about it [in any sort of a critical and evaluative manner], “clean” is an odd word to stick in at this particular point. It is not a category for vines, whether fruitful or not. However “clean” is a powerful word for humans. It is a powerful category for people, playing a significant role in potential and active fruitfulness: being clean. Paul says that the word is for cleansing the soul. Again it is rather odd to use the term “word” as if it was a cleaning agent. We would expect “soap and water” or “water” or blood, perhaps, if the reference is ceremonial. Interestingly if you were to go and look in Ephesians 5:25-26 you would see that Paul uses exactly the same terminology once again: *“Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water and the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*

Truth is the agent that cleans, exposing and scrubbing out what is false and deceiving. That is one of the reasons why we find reading the Word of God comprehensively, not selectively, troublesome: it exposes us, and that is precisely what it is designed to do. It is designed to expose that which is wrong, that which is deficient. It exposes those areas of disobedience, rebellion and doubt. It exposes those areas of pride and resistance and refusal. It exposes us so that we can become clean. That is its purpose. It also builds us up, gives us strength, renews our hope: that is its purpose. But God is not in the business of taking His hand and covering over internal corruption so that the wound of sin remains festering, hidden beneath the appearance of wellbeing. Rather God will through His word take the knife edge of that word, the double edged sword, and he will slice through the false covering and lay bare before His Holy Spirit that which is the true condition of the heart. Not that we would be miserable for no other purpose than that we would be miserable, but so that we might be healed. And being healed, being restored to

health. And having health [we would] have joy again in life: that is the purpose of God. Fruitfulness and holiness are inseparably woven together in the Christian’s walk of faith.

This is the second time Jesus has said that they were clean. The first time that Jesus said they were clean He was washing the disciples’ feet and He responded to Peter – this is in John 13 – who said “You are not washing [my feet]” and Jesus said, “If I don’t wash you, you have no part in me,” then Peter said, “Don’t wash my feet only, wash me altogether, top to bottom!” *“At that time Jesus said to him, the one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”* Jesus at that point was, of course, referring to Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot was not clean. Perhaps we should think about Judas Iscariot as an example of a branch removed by the Father. After all, Judas had had full exposure to Jesus for the same amount of time all the rest of them had. He had seen all that Jesus had done, he had heard all that Jesus had spoken. But Judas was not clean. That is to say, Judas was not holy. That is to say the words of Jesus were not received by Judas, and therefore they could not perform their cleansing work within his heart and mind, and he remained therefore a corrupted soul. Instead of receiving the words of Jesus, we know that Judas in the end received the words of Satan. And the end of that little episode is that Judas went into the night. Are we clean?

Interestingly as we continue our study of the Word we recognize that it is not sufficient to merely be clean. If you were to turn in your scriptures to Luke 11:24-26, there you would have the account of Jesus speaking about a person who has had a demon cast out of their life. They are now clean. But we are told that the demon, now being “homeless”, goes out and finds seven other demons more wicked than he, and he comes back and, behold, what does he find? He finds an empty soul. The house is clean, but there is no one living there, no spirit indwells. So that demon with his seven new friends moves right back in again.

Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” To abide in Jesus is to have the Spirit and the word abide in you. Jesus states the metaphor again; He says the only way for a branch to be fruitful is by abiding, that is having the living presence of, being a living presence in the vine, He is the vine and we are the branches. Jesus says it again, twice more, four times He says abide in Me. In fact in this passage there are ten times that Jesus says, “Abide in”, “abide in”, “abide in”. Ten times! It is like He sets up megaphones and He says, “This is it!” What is it? Take it in that the Word of God becomes the breathing presence of the truth of the Ever-living One. If it hurts, it hurts; but it heals.

There are two priorities that come together here. The first is that to be fruitful we must abide in Christ. The second is that what is wanted is for the branch to bear much fruit. We should never forget the distinction. It is one thing to say, “I am saved,” it is another to say, “I am fruitful.”

Jesus indicates, in fact, that these two priorities are actually two commitments. These commitments must be made and carried through. The first commitment [is], “I will abide in Christ.” The second [is], “I commit to have Jesus’ words abide in me.” These two commitments entail first of all directing the desires of our hearts and our thoughts and our minds, our hopes and our fears and all the rest of what we are to the enthroned Son of God. “I take what I am, good, bad and indifferent, and I give it to God. And I ask that God would rest His hand upon me, that He would sort me out, that He would keep what is worth anything, and He would get rid of what is worth nothing, and He would transform me into the image of His Son. I am submitted to the Holy One.” We remember in this process that He has died for us and has taken away the guilt for our sin, and in love He has given to us the Spirit as the guarantee of our salvation and as the companion for our walk of faith. What kind of faith? [Hebrews 11:1] *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”* That is the first commitment.

The second commitment: I will devote myself to the serious and consistent study of God’s Word. God’s word is to live in me. This implies that the words have taken root in my soul. When being tested by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus said, *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”* God’s word, therefore, is the equivalent of bread for the soul. Better, it is to view the Word of God as designed to alter our moral and spiritual DNA. It is integral to our being new creatures in Christ. If you were to turn to Romans 8:3-8, you would read there and see that is by way of applying what we learn in the Word that we then put to death, [and] progressively clean out the old man in us. That is the action of the Word of God in us. That is why it is necessary and not just helpful to have the Word of God applied to our understanding by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, we see that we have become through the power of the Word new creatures in Christ. This is an act of creation by God. It is only as we come to understand the depth and the extent of the transforming work of the Living Word in us, making us into new creatures in Christ and like Christ that we can understand what Jesus says in verse 7 of chapter 15. This one of those marvelous promises that are just incomprehensible. What does He say? “Ask for whatever you want and the Father will give it to you.” Have you tried it recently? We don’t dare. We draw back. We tremble. We think, “Ah!” And [it is] well that we do. Why? Because the promise is handed to those whose DNA, their moral DNA has been changed by the Word of God so that they desire what God desires. They live to be holy. They want in all things that the glory of God would be advanced. So God says, “Of course!” But is it not so that we too often cling to our own agenda and resist the leading of the Spirit of God? That we prefer ignorance to knowledge thinking that ignorance will excuse us from what the Word says? That we step back into the shadows and draw the shadows around us thinking that if the light has not exposed us therefore we are not seen. But we are seen, for nothing is hidden from the eye of God.

If anything, this context of the promise of fulfilled promise is more overwhelming and specific than it was in the fourteenth chapter [of John]. Jesus has led into the promise here with the warning that those who neglect or ignore His Word will be thrown away and whither. He follows the promise by repeating truths already stated. *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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.”* Already Jesus had said that He will act in accord with our prayers. Why will He act in accord with our prayers? This is why Jesus answers our prayers, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Jesus here clarifies that the Father is glorified by Jesus’ disciples bearing much fruit. I am sure we get the picture. The fruit that Jesus has in mind is the fruit of godliness, that is, the way and the degree to which we take on the character qualities of Jesus, that perfect man, and live for the glory of God. There are places you can go [to learn of this fruit]. In Galatians 5:22-24 what are the qualities of the Spirit? Are these your qualities? Are these the qualities that mark our lives? Do we breathe this kind of atmosphere around us? Love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and faithfulness and goodness and self-control: is that the atmosphere that we bring with us into every place that we go? What about the Beatitudes? Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount spoke of those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn for sin and its devastation in peoples’ lives, those who are gentle, whose strength is restrained for the sake of goodness, those who have a passion for righteousness, a living faith in God, those who are full of mercy, those who are characterized by purity of heart, and the readiness to be a peacemaker and to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Those are nine qualities and you have to ask, “Is it the case that these qualities, these devotions, these dispositions, these perceptions and pursuits, are these things being created in me and am I manifesting these things as I walk in the world? That is the fruit, and God desires a fruitful life: The Beatitudes.

Our part is to read, listen, study, interact with others about those words given to us by God as we rely on the Holy Spirit and thereby live according to what we know. One brief word of application – I hope the Spirit has been applying plenty already! This is one of the reasons, knowing what I have just said, why I am mystified by so many, even in this congregation, who seem content with what I would call “Word Lite.” Come on a Sunday morning and

that’s it. Often spending no time in the Word during the week. Accepting no discipline of study, no Sunday School classes of deeper engagement in the Word of God. I think to myself, if I lived at that level of the intake of the Word of God, I would be a dead guy! But if I was the pastor of a congregation in which all were fully devoted to the consistent study of the Word of God, and engaged in mutual edification, that each one would know the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, I couldn’t build a building large enough to hold those who would gather and the city of Oroville would be known throughout the entirety of the United State as a place where God is, and is changing the world.

Let us pray: Father in heaven we are about to partake together of the elements of the Communion. This is the remembrance of the greatest act of grace that will ever performed. That is, the Holy Son of God came and became a man, entering into our condition and took upon Himself the lowliest of standings and stations in life, that He might fully identify not with the rich and powerful and the privileged but with the broken and the low and those who are used and mistreated by the world. Then, Father, beyond that, far beyond that, He took upon Himself the whole of our sin and He died for it, and thereby, by Your grace, we are alive to You. Bless us in this remembrance, Father, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. In what ways have you organized or arranged your life according to what you know is true? The other way round, what does the way you actually live say about what you believe?
2. How would you describe a fruitful Christian life? Who might you name as an example of this?
3. We both believe and fail to believe: what are areas of strong belief in your life and what are some areas of weak belief or even unbelief?
4. Has the Word acted as a cleansing agent in your life? If so, how has this worked for you?
5. What is your response to this statement from the message: “The **first** commitment entails directing the desires of our hearts and the thoughts of our minds, our hopes and our fears and all the rest of what we are to the enthroned Son of God?”
6. Of the nine fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), which are most challenging for you?
7. Which of the eight Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10) best captures your imagination?
8. What do you find is the greatest obstacle to consistent and in-depth (soul cleansing and life changing) study of God’s Word?
9. What are some false comforts people take from God’s Word and how might more consistent study of and exposure to the Word correct these?