

Sermon - 05-09-21

Ps 98; Acts 10:44-48; 1 Jn 5:1-6; Jn 15:9-17

Holy Communion – 6<sup>th</sup> Sun of Easter

Bear Fruit that Lasts! Mother's Day

In the Season of Easter, we re-member the conversions that mark the beginning of the church. Earlier in John chapter 15, is the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian finance director on the Gaza Road. Today, we are looking in on the Roman Centurion, Cornelius of Caesarea. The Scripture we have heard this morning describes the scene of another Holy Spirit set-up: Peter has been summoned to the centurion's house to meet with this God-fearing man. Like the eunuch reading the Prophet Isaiah traveling in his chariot, Cornelius would never be welcome within the walls of the temple in Jerusalem. By Hebrew Law he would be labeled a pagan forever. And, he would have no way to stand among the people of God in worship. He could have private prayer and praise – or he could form a small group of God-fearers somewhere outside the temple.

**But**, both the Ethiopian and the Roman can enter the covenant made in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus always makes a way where there is no way. He is the Way. Jesus says, "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" (Jn 15:10) His commandment is love. We, the people of God, have become the temple of God. So, we today may serve and love Him and "bear fruit that lasts."

Our victory over adversity and trouble in the world dwells in – abides in -- our praise and worship of our Savior. The Greek word "homo-logeo" literally means "speak the same thing" and can also be translated "confess" (cf Heb 13:15). A sacrifice of praise is the fruit of lips that openly "speak the same thing" as His name. "Name" represents the title and dignity of the Lord and everything implied in His authority, character, majesty, power, excellence, and all His attributes. The psalmist says, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things." Sing the praises of Jesus! Does praise produce fruit?

What is the fruit that lasts? We know that fresh fruit from the field and off the tree does not last. It will spoil quickly. So, at a crucial point, we take the parable of the vine and the branches Jesus tells and begin to apply it to our love and our devotion for Him. You and I cannot not read the parables literally. They don't make sense as spiritual and moral teaching if all God wants from us is healthy grapes. Jesus teaches us that we must abide in His love – we must allow the fullness of His love to flow into and through us to bring His glory and His transforming power into the world. The disobedient, the self-driven, the prestige-seeker is a withered, dried up branch that is pruned, bundled and burned outside the vineyard.

We see fruit in the lives of courageous and inspiring saints who remained in Christ no matter what: Jim Elliot, the missionary to the Auca people of Ecuador – William Tyndale and John Wycliffe, who translated the Bible for the common people – Martin Luther, who brought the fire of true faith and devotion to the spiritual life of the church – John Wesley, who emphasized and revitalized the working of the Holy Spirit in the people of God. These, and many more, have blazed a trail of obedience, love and devotion to Jesus. We learn from them what it looks like to bear fruit that lasts.

The missionaries, preachers and teachers I mention built on the foundation of personal devotion to Jesus that sustained them in their ministry. In the 1500s, Jim Elliot gave his life to bring the Gospel to the Auca people. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, John Wycliffe translated the Latin Bible into English. He started the ball rolling that led eventually to the Protestant Reformation. His Bible was banned by the church. Tyndale was a 15<sup>th</sup> c. scholar who translated the Bible into English from the Hebrew and Greek. His opponents executed him by strangling, then burned him at the stake for his work.

You and I can always depend on Jesus to supply all the grace and power required to live a godly life. May He find us more and more dependable – more and more there – more fruitful day by day. Devotion, over time, produces lasting fruit in the most humble Jesus-follower. Christ in you brings forth what the Apostle Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23) These are the qualities that transform us and the family, friends and neighbors around us. Amen.