

Sunday, October 14, 2018
Sermon Series: UNSELFIE-Serving in a Selfie World
“Abide In Me”
John 15:1-8

Last week, I began a new series called “Unselfie: Serving in a Selfie World.” We saw how Isaiah was called by God to find his identity in the Lord. He learned to openly express brokenness before God. He also learned to openly express availability before God. He was called to Unselfie and to serve in a selfie world. At the end of it all, Isaiah famously said, “Here I am, send me.”

We are called to Connect. Grow. Serve. The first two appeal to so many people. But to be openly available to serve the Lord? To say to God, “Here I am, send me!” ... For many, that sounds unappealing. And it sounds undesirable. And it brings a lot of uncertainty and unanswered questions. If that is how you feel, you’re not alone when it comes to this idea of serving God. But serving God is the Lord’s design for everyone who connects with Jesus and begins to grow in their faith.

For the next several weeks, our Sunday Messages serve as God’s Biblical responses to someone who says, “Here I am, send me.” Today, God says to you... sounds good. Your first step? **Abide in Me.**

John 15:1-8

In this teaching of Jesus, several things must be kept in mind:

- This is being spoken as a portion of a 3 chapter-long talk with his disciples. (Upper Room Discourse)
 - So this isn’t the main point of the talk, but it is an important one. Jesus is preparing His disciples to serve.
- In this talk, Jesus speaks repeatedly of his soon coming departure, of the Holy Spirit’s soon arrival, and the disciples’ need to obey Jesus’ words during His physical absence.
 - It is possible to stay connected to our life-source even in His physical absence (HS plays a crucial role in this)

- This talk happened just after the Last Supper, Judas' abandonment, and just before the Garden of Gethsemene and Jesus' looming death on the cross. On the 3rd day, Jesus would physically raise from the dead and would physically ascend into Heaven to take His seat of authority next to God the Father.
 - His earthly ministry has been left in the hands of the Body of Christ – the Church. And if you are saved – if you are part of His body, Jesus has left His ministry in Your Hands. How are you doing in carrying out Jesus' ministry? That's something we will all give an account for when He returns.

In Jesus' John 15 teaching, He identifies 3 roles in the vineyard:

- **Jesus is the True Vine.** It is a source of life and vitality. There is no vineyard without a vine. There is no fruit for the world to enjoy without the vine. There will be other plants and weeds to grow, but only one true vine. But a grape vine doesn't just grow up like this randomly. A truly good vine like this is intentionally planted and cared for and cultivated. And the goal is for it to produce and to reproduce.
- **God the Father is the Vinedresser.** He oversees the condition of the soil, the vine itself, its branches, the harvest of fruit and the reproduction of the process.
 - He is observant and watchful. He is "hands on." He evaluates the health and effectiveness of the vineyard.
 - He gathers fruit.
 - When He finds a branch not bearing fruit, He removes it. More on that later.
 - When He finds a branch healthy, connected to the vine and bearing fruit, He prunes it so that it will bear even more fruit.
 - There are no other types of branches. They either bear fruit, or they don't, according to the Vinedresser's standards.

- **Believers (disciples) are the Branches.**
 - It isn't the vine itself that bears fruit, it is the branches that bear fruit. But if they are diseased branches, they have to be removed. If they are fruitless, they have to be removed and replaced. If they are fruitful, they are harvested. But fruitful branches are also pruned – responsibly cut back – so they are primed and ready for more growth and fruit in the future.
 - We must see our rightful place in the Lord's garden.
 - We are not in charge of it – the vinedresser is (God the Father)
 - The garden does not revolve around us. The garden centers around the vine – the way it grows, the direction it grows, the soil it grows in. But in the vineyard, it's all about the vine. One of our highest values here at First, is that Jesus is First here at First.
 - We are the branches. That's our job. That's the role that we have. It is our responsibility to **bring forth fruit**. (serve)
 - This happens when we are well-connected to the vine.
 - Connection with prayer
 - Connection with His word
 - So, being connected to Jesus is foundational.
 - Being fruitful includes a periodic pruning/purging (responsibly cut back) – so that we can produce MORE fruit.
 - Being fruitful happens when bugs and disease (sin) are properly managed and when soil is properly maintained.
 - A big point Jesus makes repeatedly... *you cannot bear fruit without being connected to Jesus.*
 - Show an actual branch from the apple tree. Is it going to produce any apples?

- There is something else that happens to the branches in God's vineyard of disciples. The ones that do not produce fruit, God removes them; gathers them; and they are burned.
 - This is not the main point of this teaching. But it does deserve a moment of our attention.
 - The burning is NOT a picture of hell. (although that happens there).
 - We are already clean (saved... vs 3)
 - All of the true branches were born out of the vine – true life. But these that are unfruitful, they're not being removed and burned because they're somehow no longer in the vine. They're just not fruitful.
 - 1 – God removes in order to make room for more fruitful growth
 - 2 – God removes and makes the branches productive for something – even if that means just a temporary result like heat, light, cooking, etc that fire can bring.
 - Keep in mind – this whole teaching is not literal – it is figurative. (Jesus is not actually a vine and we are not actually branches – so be careful to not assume that this fire is actual)
 - Also please... – if you know of a person who has passed away, that is not an indication that the person wasn't living right and is being eliminated. That is not our place to make that conclusion!
 - It's not always indicating the end of a person's life... sometimes it indicates the end of a person's ministry opportunities.

The main point of this figurative example is of monumental importance: **You must remain in a healthy connection with Jesus if you want a positive ministry outcome for God.**

- If you are already active in serving the Lord, it can get busy and it can be taxing. Make sure you're making your personal connection with Jesus a priority. Spend time with Him. Keep that relationship strong and don't make it an afterthought as the demands of ministry press in on you.

John 15:4-5.

How do we remain in a good connection with Jesus?

That's a question that certainly came up for His disciples as He was about to be physically removed from them. The Holy Spirit plays a very important role in these points...

1. Read & Study His Word

Every productive disciple should do both. Read large portions. Study small portions. Get yourself in a routine and/or an environment to keep this happening!

2. Memorize His Word (start with verses 4-5!)

3. Meditate on His Word

Psalm 1:2-3... the truly blessed person... "his delight is in the law of the LORD and on His law he meditates day and night."

It goes on to say in vs 3, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

4. Be a Prayerful Person

Prayer isn't just a procedural undertaking. It is more than just words before a meal or at the end of a sermon. Prayer is our dependence on God.

- **Dependence on God's Direction**

How else will you know His will for your life and ministry?

How can you produce any fruit for Him without His direction in the first place?

Learn to pray about this and trust His direction for your life.

- **Dependence on God's Provision**
 - The branch completely depends on the vine or the trunk of the tree for life and health

- **Dependence on God's Protection**
 - When the winds and storms come, the branch is hanging onto the only thing there – the vine or the tree. Without that connection, the branch is blown away.

- **Dependence on God's Intervention**
 - This is our “prayer request list.” These are our hurts, our burdens, our sorrows, our deep needs – we want God to intervene and work mightily.

John 15:7

This isn't supposed to really sound like a letter to Santa.

It's conditional... *IF You abide in me... and IF My words abide in you... your desires will be met.*

Sounds great! But keep this in mind... if you truly do cling close to the Lord and if His words abide and reside on your heart and mind... your desires will change.

They won't be selfie, me-centered desires. They will be servant-like, God-centered desires.

You must remain in a healthy connection with Jesus if you want a positive ministry outcome for the Lord.

John 15:8

The Father (vinedresser) is glorified when we (branches) bear much fruit.

We've already seen that the Father carefully examines the branches and puts them in a position to bear much fruit for His glory. There is evaluation.

We as a church leadership feel confident in the calling God has given us: Connect. Grow. Serve.

If we as a church bear fruit – it will be a product of Connect, Grow, Serve.

As the Father evaluates His vineyard, we feel a responsibility to evaluate our ministries as a church so that we produce much fruit along the lines of Connect, Grow, Serve.

Ministry evaluation. Deacon led. Gauging the effectiveness of our ministry individually and as a whole. Are our ministries accomplishing this? How can we better foster that? Do we need to make changes? Do we need to begin new things? Do we need to discontinue some things to make room for new things? These are all questions that we need to answer so that we are the healthiest branches possible for producing Connect, Grow, Serve Fruit for the Lord's Glory.

For each of us, we need to do some evaluating in our own lives.

- **Are we connected to the Lord at all? How can one abide in the vine if you're not connected to it?**
- **Are we flourishing through our connection with the Lord?**
- **Are we barely hanging on?**
- **Are we producing fruit... or are we in a season of preparation to produce fruit?**
 - **If so, I want to remind you... Every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (vs 2)**
- **Are we not producing any fruit? If so – Every branch that does not bear fruit, He takes away... and withers.**

Abiding in Jesus is a reality – in terms of His great salvation.

But abiding in Jesus is a choice – in terms of your availability and effectiveness.

If you are going to Unselfie and serve in a selfie world, you have to Abide in the Lord – and you will produce much fruit for the Lord... for His glory.