

Read: John 15:1-8

Are You a Growing Branch?

John 15:5,6

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Spring is here! It's a season where plants poke through the soil, and tree branches sprout leaves... at least, most tree branches. Sometimes tree branches snap off and end up on the ground. The rest of the tree is growing new green leaves, but that dead branch isn't connected to the tree anymore. It isn't growing like rest of the tree.

Throughout the book of John, Jesus uses lots of word pictures to describe himself and his relationship with those who believe in him. In today's reading, Jesus calls himself the vine and his followers the branches. Just like a tree helps its branches grow green leaves, so too Jesus helps his followers—us!—grow in our faith. And just like a branch on the ground is dead because it's not connected to the tree, so too our faith will suffer and eventually die if we don't stay connected to Jesus.

That can be a scary thought! Do you ever worry whether you're still connected to Jesus, still a growing branch and not a dead branch? Sure, you go to church and listen to God's Word. But is that really enough? There are times when you fight with your friends, when you talk back to your parents, when you are angry at everybody. Do these times mean you are in danger of becoming disconnected from Jesus? Are you close to becoming a dry, dead branch?

There's a small word in today's reading that can help you not worry about being strong enough to stay connected to Jesus. Did you catch it? Jesus says to "remain" in him. He doesn't say "get connected to me" or "find a way to make your connection with me stronger." Instead, he says "remain in me." Jesus connected you to him like a branch is connected to a tree. Maybe you came to faith at your baptism, or maybe it was when you were a little older. Whenever it was, Jesus promised to remain in you so you can believe in him.

Yes, there are times when you will struggle with a certain sin, when you feel like you're not doing anything right, when your faith doesn't feel strong, but like a weak branch. In those moments, remember the strength of the vine—of your Savior, Jesus—and know that he's the one keeping you connected to him. What a reassuring thought!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What does Jesus call himself in today's reading? What does he call us?
- Why can't branches on the ground grow leaves or fruit?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Why is the word "remain" so important in today's reading?
- How can you be sure that you're a growing branch and not a dead branch?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- What are some specific ways you can show that you're growing, that you're bearing fruit?
- What could you say to help comfort someone who is worried about whether they're producing enough spiritual fruit?

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank you for doing everything needed to connect us to you. When we doubt or feel weak, remind us that our strength comes from you: the vine, the one who provides everything we need to stay strong and grow spiritually. Amen.

Hymn: CW 385:1,3 – Chief of Sinners Though I Be

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed his blood for me,
Died that I might live on high,
Lives that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine,
I am his and he is mine!

Only Jesus can impart
Comfort to a wounded heart;
Peace that flows from sin forgiv'n,
Joy that lifts the soul to heav'n,
Faith and hope to walk with God
In the way that Enoch trod.