**October 13th, 2019**

**1st Sunday FBC Dothan**

**John 15:1-5**

**Introduction: I am so excited to be here with you in Dothan. Everyone has been so kind to me and my family. I have more food in my pantry than I have ever had my entire adult life. I have like 3 boxes of Cinnamon Toast Crunch which happens to be one of my favorite cereals. We arrived in town last Thursday evening, and I have to compliment the fine men and women of the Dothan Police Department. My parents kept our kids for us a few days so that we could unpack all of our boxes and get the house all setup, and we aren’t used to having time to ourselves. So it was 7:30PM, and it was so quiet and it was a weird feeling so we decided let’s go out. We got in the car and we headed towards Barnes and Noble. I needed a new book to read since I had just finished a book earlier that day. I’m not familiar with the roads around here yet, which also means that I am not familiar with the speed limits. I look in my mirror and I notice flashing blue and red lights. I pull over and the police offer informs me that I was going 48MPH in a 30MPH zone. We told him that we were new in town and asked him how to get to the Barnes and Noble. He took my license and Ashley was in the passenger seat rolling her eyes at me. He came back to the car and said, Did you say this is your first day in town, and I said yes sir. Then he asked me the dreaded question that I hoped he would not ask me what brings you to Dothan. The very question I was hoping I could avoid. I told him that I moved to work at a church here in town. Honestly, I was too embarrassed to tell him the name of the church or what my role at the church was. And then he said, well consider this your welcome to Dothan have a good evening! I am now the biggest supporter of the Dothan Police Department! You only get one first sermon at a new church, and honestly, it’s a lot of pressure. First impressions only come around one time. As I was thinking about what I could share with the congregation today as we move forward together a lot of different things came to mind. But ultimately, I kept coming back to John 15. So, over the next 6 weeks we are going to unpack this rich chapter. And the chapter can basically be divided up into 3 sections. First, John talks about the source of our strength as a church, then he talks about the charge of the church, and he closes the chapter talking about the response of the world to the church and to us as individuals. Our passage for today is John 15:1-5. John says,**

**I. Jesus is Our Identity: *1*** *I am the true vine and my father is the vinedresser.*

A. God repeatedly used the image of the vine as a symbol of his people. In ancient Israel and in the Greco-Roman world that Jesus used grape vines were very common. In addition, a golden vine was on the temple indicating that Israel was God’s vine.

B. But in this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that he is the true vine. And yet, Jesus also says that his father was the vinedresser. In this verse Jesus is showing us that he had respect for the authority of his Father. Even Jesus submitted to the leadership of his father. Time after time in the New Testament we see Jesus giving credit to his Father for the miracles he was able to perform. We also see Jesus making sure he stayed connected to the source. Jesus gets away from the crowds, stops teaching, and doesn’t perform miracles all in an attempt to make sure he stayed connected to the vinedresser.

C. Perhaps some of you were thinking today that I was going to come in and cast this grand vision for the future of our church. But please hear me this morning, there is no grand vision for this church apart from being connected to the true vine. The greatest vision I can cast for you is to tell you to make sure that you are connected to the true vine. Before God does anything in our midst, we must keep ourselves before the Lord in prayer and in the study of his word.

D. The scariest thing we could do as a church would be to make up our plan of what we want to accomplish and sprinkle a little bit of Jesus in on the side. This is not my church and it’s not your church. It is the church of Jesus Christ. Let’s make sure the identity of this local body of believers is Jesus.

\*Everyone knows how important it is to cite your sources. In academic writing, if the idea or statement that you are making does not originate with you, you must give credit to the source. The act of attributing thoughts or ideas that are not your own as your own is called plagiarism. In most academic circles this results in an automatic “F” and sometimes expulsion. The famous poet and playwright T.S. Elliot wrote a poem in 1922 called “The Wasteland.” Decades later it was discovered that the poem was largely a hodgepodge of text from lesser known poets. When we take credit for the ways that God has blessed us in this life, we are guilty of spiritual plagiarism. We are attributing our success in the world to our own efforts, and we are not giving credit to the true source of our success. Your intelligence, your work ethic, your ability to solve problems are all gifts that God has blessed you with. Whatever and however God chooses to use us as a church, we will make sure he gets the glory for it.

**II. Examine Our Fruit: *2*** *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

A. Jesus makes it clear the branches that are not bearing fruit will be taken away. Why were these branches not bearing fruit? The answer is simple they were connected to the vine, and therefore they were not getting the proper nutrients to remain healthy. If you want to see rotten fruit in your life that disconnect from the vine. In other words, if you want to see behavior that does not reflect Jesus then stay disconnected from Jesus.

B. Now everyone knows that no matter how connected we stay to the true vine we will still have sin in our life, but our best chance at living a life of holiness will be when we sell out to staying connected to the true vine.

\*A couple of years ago we had this free program going on in our neighborhood where we get to pick out a free fruit tree. But the catch was we had to plant it in the front of our house so that the neighborhood people could come and get fruit from our tree. They offered all sorts of different types of trees: Lemon, cumquat, satsuma, and avocado but the one I ultimately chose was the Pomegranate tree. My wife wasn’t too pleased with my choice, but my thinking was we would be the only people in New Orleans with a pomegranate tree planted in their front yard. We brought the tree home and planted in towards the end of January of 2018, and we knew that the tree wouldn’t produce any fruit the first season, but I just knew that this year was the year. Spring time came around again this year and hardly anything.

C. I’m not sure what’s going on with my tree. It’s hard to diagnose the problem, but it’s not hard to diagnose what happens in our own lives. We do not bear fruit if our hearts are not in the right place. I’ll take that one step further; this church will not bear fruit if our hearts are not in the right place. We don’t want to be a room full of rotten fruit.

D. Instead, we want all the branches that are healthy and vibrant with fruit. We want there to be so much fruit on our branches that we pluck the good fruit off the branch so that those branches can continue to grow more and more healthy fruit.

E. Let me ask this question, why should God use our church to reach the community of Dothan if we have tons of rotten fruit? During this time of transition that we are in with a new pastor coming in, it only makes sense to take a hard look at our hearts.

F. Verse 3 is the one that kind of stands out from the rest of the passage, but what Jesus is saying here is that the disciples who he is addressing are already clean because Jesus had been speaking the word to them already. Jesus doesn’t mean that they are clean forever because we will always have sin in our life because of our sin nature, but the disciples have been walking and talking with Jesus for a long time, so they have a little bit of a head start.

**III. Connect to the Source: 4** *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.*

A. Jesus tells his disciples and he is telling us this morning that we should abide in him and he will abide in us. All of us are incapable of bearing fruit unless we abide in the vine. Jesus is saying that whatever good fruit you think you are producing if it doesn’t come from the true vine than it is not good fruit. That’s a little scary to think about but it is possible to be doing good things and yet not be connected to the true vine.

B. A lot of people in our world today are doing good things. They are giving away their money, volunteering their time to make the world a better place, and showing compassion and generosity towards people and those are all good things. I hope you are doing the same thing, but it is not good fruit unless you are doing as you abide in Jesus.

C. This is a little sobering to think about but one day those of us who are in Christ will all stand before him and he will judge every deed good and bad that we have done in our life. He knows the motive behind every good deed we have done. And what I’m afraid is going to happen, in fact I know it is going to happen is when we get to heaven we will find out that so many of the good deeds that we did were done with the wrong motive and therefore it will not be considered a good deed before God. The amount of good deeds done with a pure motive will be few and far between. This should cause us to do two things: #1 It should cause us to reflect on our motive. How often do we do the right thing to keep up appearances? And #2 In spite of the fact that most of our good deeds will actually not be done with a pure motive it should make us even more grateful for God’s grace and mercy in our lives. Even all of the good deeds that we think were done with pure motives at the end of the day it doesn’t matter because God’s grace is sufficient for all who are in Christ.

D. No good fruit can be produced apart from our connection to Jesus.

**IV. We Can Do Nothing: 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.*

A. Jesus wants to make sure that all of his disciples are grasping what he is saying. Without question, the disciples were an elite group of men. Jesus only chose 12 men to pour his life into, and it would have been really easy for the disciples to think that they had the capability on their own to do great things.

B. Jesus reminds them again that he is the vine. The disciples were not the vine, and we are not the vine. Ministry doesn’t happen because of our abilities, but rather God working through us.

C. What does Jesus actually mean when he says you can do nothing. We know that a lot of stuff can be accomplished apart from the vine, but it the stuff of eternal significance cannot be accomplished apart from Christ. And here is where it kind of gets scary. Because we could fill up the space with tons and tons of people and on paper it would like we are doing great things for God, and yet it is completely possible for us to have 1,000s of people in this room and be moving in the opposite direction of where God wants us to go. I want to grow this church just as much as all of you in this room. I would love to see this place busting at the seams with people on Sunday and meeting the needs of people all around the Dothan area, but if we are doing that in our own power or simply to have the biggest church in town then we are missing it friends. We are in the business of making disciples who will make more disciples. That is our primary focus. And if that means that a byproduct of that is that we bust at the seams than great, but the focus is disciples who make disciples.

D. So I would simply ask you to join me in prayer. As we as a staff seek God’s direction on the future of our church. But it’s not simply my vision or the staff’s vision. It’s OUR vision. We all have to be on board with where God is going to take us.

**Conclusion:**