

Sermon Outline  
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church  
“Living as Christians in a Secular Society through a Connection with Christ”  
(Part III of “Christian Living in a Secular Society”)  
November 02, 2025

Scripture

John 15:1-6  
Isaiah 27:2-6

Core Idea and purpose

**Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:**

- (10/19/2025) Going deep into God’s written word sets us apart from secular society
- (10?26/2025) As we become holy, we will stand out from the secular world and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

**Core Idea:** If we stay connected to Christ, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society.

**Challenge/purpose:** To encourage the congregation to stay connected to God by remembering their past saints.

The Sermon

The branches of a grape vine make absolutely no effort to grow grapes, yet the grapes appear. If they stay connected to a healthy vine, they will automatically produce fruit. It just happens – it seems like magic.

This is a beautiful metaphor Jesus uses to teach us about producing good fruit in our lives. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. The goodness, justice & love that we add to the world is the fruit.

All we have to do is stay connected to Jesus and our lives will add goodness, justice, and love to the world and this will make the world a bit more like Heaven. It’s the fulfillment of what we pray every Sunday, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The last two Sundays, we talked about Christian living in a secular society. We talked about Christian living in a secular society through Bible study. Then we talked about Christian living in a secular society through holiness. Now we talk about Christian living in a secular society through a connection with Christ. If we, the branches, stay connected to Christ, the vine, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society. Let me say this again: If we stay connected to Christ, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society.

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The connection we must have with Jesus is not the same kind of superficial connection we make through Facebook or twitter. We often think we're connected because we have a smart phone that can send text messages, deliver e-mails or post something on Facebook and Twitter. These social media connections are often illusionary. Taking a picture of your dinner and posting it on Facebook for hundreds or even thousands of people to see is cool but it does not make a genuine connection. Having hundreds of friends on Facebook and a thousand followers on Twitter may make you popular. But does it make genuine connections? Having the ability to unfriend someone at the slightest offense makes for a lousy connection. Having a thousand likes for your comment on Twitter does not mean you are right. It may mean that there are many people who are just as wrong as you are. Jesus wants more than a social media type of connection with us.

The type of connection we need to have with Jesus is more like the connection between elderly couples – two people who have been married 30, 40, 50 or even 60 years. The connection they have with each other is deep, intimate & unbreakable

About 12 years ago, I ministered to an elderly couple with this type of deep, intimate & unbreakable connection. They first met each other in high school. The wife was a young Latin teacher fresh out of college and the husband was one of her students. At first, there was no romantic relationship between them. They always kept the proper teacher/student relationship. After high school, when the husband was in his mid to late twenties, they started dating. At this point, they started to connect. A few years later they got married and began the journey of becoming 'one'. After 50 to 60 years of marriage they were able to complete each other's sentences. Verbal communication became less necessary. They knew each other's desires without saying any words. One of their favorite past times was sitting quietly next to each other basking in each other's presence. They ended their life on earth at the same nursing home. The wife went first and about a month later, the husband followed. The connection between these two lovebirds approaches the connection Jesus wants to have with us.

When we have this type of connection, we open ourselves up to pruning. When the farmer prunes a vine, he cuts out all the old wood so that, during the next harvest, new shoots will grow and produce fruit. Likewise, as we stay connected to Jesus, God – The Holy Spirit - cuts out all the old wood embedded in our hearts. God cuts out the 'old wood' of wrong thinking, the 'old wood' of bad attitudes and the 'old wood' of illicit desires. This is not a fun or easy process, but it enables the 'new wood' of faith, hope and love to grow from within our hearts.

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As the pruning occurs, we begin to learn the mind of Christ. We start to understand what Jesus may be thinking in each situation. Perhaps we can even begin to complete His sentences. We develop the same attitudes and desires of Jesus. In short, we become more holy & loving like Jesus. The more holy & loving we become, the more goodness, justice, and love we can add to the world.

The most obvious ways to stay connected to Jesus is prayer, worship, and Bible study. In addition to these obvious ways, we can remember our past saints. Remembering our past saints can help us, the branches, stay connected to Jesus, the vine. Let me say this again: Remembering our past saints can help us, the branches, stay connected to Jesus, the vine. Past saints are those people who taught us to live as faithful Christians before they died. We learn from both their strengths and weaknesses. Sit back and think of a person who taught you about faith in Jesus before he/she went home to be with the Lord. This could be a parent, Sunday school teacher, coach, boss, employee, friend, relative, Biblical character, or historical figure...anyone who has been a good influence in your life.

One of my personal past saints is a guy named Warren. He was the Director of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) for students from the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), Washington and Lee University, and other schools. I participated in the BSU to socialize with the ladies. (VMI was all male at the time.) Despite my nefarious reasons for attending BSU meetings, Warren taught me about Jesus and, more importantly, provided me a good example of what it means to follow Christ. Rather than judge me, he patiently mentored me.

A historical figure that is a past saint for me is Abraham Lincoln. His faith is very hard to pin down. He never officially joined a Christian denomination and rarely attended church service. But he read the Bible many times. Lincoln knew the Bible better than most pastors. I believe that because of his study of the Bible, Lincoln became very humble and wise. For example, although Lincoln always hated slavery and considered it to be evil, he never portrayed non-slaveholding northerners as being morally superior to slave-owning southerners. He said that if he and the other northerners were born into a southern plantation-owning family, they too would likely support the evil institution of slavery. Lincoln was also humble enough to change his views on race. As a young man, Lincoln hated slavery but still held the prejudicial views of his day. He did not believe that Blacks should have the same equality as Whites. But, by the end of the Civil War, he was openly talking about giving African Americans the right to vote. God gave Lincoln this humility through Bible study. I can learn from Lincoln's humility and that is why I consider him to be one of my saints.

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Right now, we are going to remember our saints. After this moment of remembrance, we'll go right into Holy Communion and remember the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior & Lord, Jesus. When you think of a past saint, stand up, yell out the person's name. After you yell out the person's name, Lisa will ring a bell in that person's honor.

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Sermon Outline

- I. The branches of a grape vine make absolutely no effort to grow grapes, yet the grapes appear.
  - A. If they stay connected to a healthy vine, they will automatically produce fruit.
    - It just happens – it seems like magic.
  - B. This is a beautiful metaphor Jesus uses to teach us about producing good fruit in our lives.
    - Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches.
    - The goodness, justice & love that we add to the world is the fruit.
  - C. All we have to do is stay connected to Jesus and our lives will add goodness, justice, and love to the world and this goodness, justice, and love will make the world a bit more like Heaven.
    - It’s the fulfillment of what we pray every Sunday, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
- II. The last two Sundays, we talked about Christian living in a secular society.
  - A. We talked about Christian living in a secular society through Bible study.
  - B. Then we talked about Christian living in a secular society through holiness.
  - C. Now, we talk about Christian living in a secular society through a connection with Christ.
    - If we, the branches, stay connected to Christ, the vine, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society.

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- Let me say this again: If we, the branches, stay connected to Christ, the vine, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society.

III. The type of connection we must have with Jesus

A. The connection we must have with Jesus is not the same kind of superficial connection we make through Facebook or twitter.

- We often think we're connected because we have a smart phone that can send text messages, deliver e-mails or post something on Facebook and Twitter.
- These social media connections are often illusionary.
  - Taking a picture of your dinner and posting it on Facebook for hundreds or even thousands of people to see is cool but it does not make a genuine connection.
  - Having hundreds of friends on Facebook and a thousand followers on Twitter may make you popular.
    - But does it make genuine connections?
  - Having the ability to unfriend someone at the slightest offense makes for a lousy connection.
  - Having a thousand likes for your comment on Twitter does not mean you are right.
    - It may mean that there are many people who are just as wrong as you are.

- Jesus wants more than a social media type of connection with us.

B. The type of connection we need to have with Jesus is more like the connection between elderly couples

- two people who have been married 30, 40, 50 or even 60 years.
- The connection they have with each other is deep, intimate & unbreakable

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- About 12 years ago, I ministered to an elderly couple with this type of deep, intimate & unbreakable connection.
    - They first met each other in high school.
      - The wife was a young Latin teacher fresh out of college and the husband was one of her students.
    - At first, there was no romantic relationship between them.
    - They always kept the proper teacher/student relationship.
    - After high school, when the husband was in his mid to late twenties, they started dating.
    - At this point, they started to connect.
    - A few years later they got married and began the journey of becoming ‘one’.
      - After 50 to 60 years of marriage they were able to complete each other’s sentences.
      - Verbal communication became less necessary.
      - They knew each other’s desires without saying any words.
      - One of their favorite past times was sitting quietly next to each other basking in each other’s presence.
    - They ended their life on earth at the same nursing home.
      - The wife went first and about a month later, the husband followed. T
    - The connection between these two lovebirds approaches the connection Jesus wants to have with us.
- C. When we have this type of connection with Jesus, we open ourselves up to pruning.
- When the farmer prunes a vine, he cuts out all the old wood so that, during the next harvest, new shoots will grow and produce fruit.

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- Likewise, as we stay connected to Jesus, God – The Holy Spirit - cuts out all the old wood embedded in our hearts.
  - God cuts out...
    - The ‘old wood’ of wrong thinking,
    - the ‘old wood’ of bad attitudes
    - and the ‘old wood’ of illicit desires.
  - This is not a fun or easy process, but it enables the ‘new wood’ of faith, hope and love to grow from within our hearts.

D. As the pruning occurs, we begin to learn the mind of Christ.

- We start to understand what Jesus may be thinking in each situation.
- Perhaps we can even begin to complete His sentences.
- We develop the same attitudes and desires of Jesus.
- In short, we become more holy & loving like Jesus.
- The more holy & loving we become, the more goodness, justice, and love we can add to the world.

E. The most obvious ways to stay connected with Jesus is prayer, worship, and Bible study.

IV. In addition to these obvious ways, we can remember our past saints.

A. Remembering our past saints can help us, the branches, stay connected with Jesus, the vine.

- Let me say this again: Remembering our past saints can help us, the branches, stay connected to Jesus, the vine.

B. Past saints are those people who taught us to live as faithful Christians before they died.

- We learn from both their strengths and weaknesses.
- Sit back and think of a person who taught you about faith in Jesus before he/she went home to be with the Lord.



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- This could be a
  - parent,
  - Sunday school teacher,
  - coach,
  - boss,
  - employee,
  - friend,
  - relative,
  - or historical figure...anyone who has been a good influence in your life.

C. One of my personal past saints is a guy named Warren.

- He was the Director of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) for students from the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), Washington and Lee University, and other schools.
- I participated in the BSU to socialize with the ladies. (VMI was all male at the time.)
- Despite my nefarious reasons for attending BSU meetings, Warren taught me about Jesus and, more importantly, provided me a good example of what it means to follow Christ.
- Rather than Judge me, he patiently mentored me.

D. A historical figure that is a past saint for me is Abraham Lincoln.

- His faith is very hard to pin down.
  - He never officially joined a Christian denomination and rarely attended church service.
- But, he read the Bible many times.
  - Lincoln knew the Bible better than most pastors.
- I believe that because of his study of the Bible, Lincoln became very humble and wise.

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- For example, although Lincoln hated slavery and considered it to be evil, he never portrayed non-slaveholding northerners as being morally superior to slave-owning southerners.
- Lincoln was also humble enough to change his views on race.
  - As a young man, Lincoln hated slavery but still held the prejudicial views of his day.
  - He did not believe that Blacks should have the same equality as Whites.
  - But, by the end of the Civil War, he was openly talking about giving African Americans the right to vote.
- God gave Lincoln this humility through Bible study.
- I can learn from Lincoln’s humility and that is why I consider him to be one of my saints.

V. Right now, we are going to remember our saints.

- A. After this moment of remembrance, we’ll go right into Holy Communion and remember the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior & Lord, Jesus.
- B. When you think of a past saint, stand up, yell out the person’s name.
- C. After you yell out the person’s name, Lisa will ring a bell in that person’s honor.