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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Easter 5
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, it is time to garden, isn't it?

The weather has been steadily improving.

The days have been getting warmer.

We have been having a nice mix of sun and some rain.

And it is time...it is time to get our flower, vegetable, herb gardens ready for planting.

Now, maybe you have already done some planting.

Maybe you just couldn't wait.

But as we know, many advise to wait until after Mother's Day to start planting.

You never know whether we might get that late spring time frost.

Nonetheless, I am sure many of us have been readying our garden beds.

Many of us have been having visions of gardening.

We are having visions of flowers beautifying our yards.

We are having visions of ripe tomatoes on the vine, where then we can make BLTs.

We are having visions of fresh cilantro to put in our homemade salsa and pico de gallo.

Yes, many of us are having wondrous visions of gardening right about now.

PAUSE

And so, and so, it is most apropos that we have our gospel lesson today from John 15.

For there we see Jesus having his own vision of gardening.

Only it is a little different from our visions of gardening, isn't it?

For Jesus envisions himself as part of the garden.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower."

Yes, Jesus envisions himself in the garden as part of the garden.

He is the vine.

And I have to believe that Jesus is imagining himself as a grape vine, as he will talk about the fruit from the vine.

So, Jesus sees himself, Jesus has visions of himself as a grape vine.

And Jesus envisions a garden where God the Father is the what? The vintner.

God the Father is the vinegrower. God the Father is the one who tends the grape vine.

But Jesus' vision doesn't end there.

No, Jesus also imagines all of us as part of the garden.

Indeed, Jesus' vision includes us, such that he sees us as the branches on this grape vine.

So imagine a main trunk of a grape vine, this is Jesus, and the branches that grow out from the main trunk are we, the people of God.

And, Jesus then describes how God the Father, as vintner, goes about his garden, and God the Father does a little pruning.

We know what that is like, surely.

In our own gardens we do our own pruning.

If we have certain flowers, like marigolds, for instance, we know that we have to dead head the brown wilted flowers so that more flowers will come.

If we have tomato plants, we might prune our plants which allows for larger fruit size and which can also speed up ripening.

But remember that you should not prune determinate varieties of tomato plants.

Only prune indeterminate varieties.

I really don't have any idea what the difference is between a determinate and indeterminate tomato plants.

That was just something I read when it comes to pruning tomato plants, some you prune, some you don't.

So, yes, we know, don't we? We know all about pruning.

And just like we might prune plants in our garden, God is pruning the branches of his grape vine that do not produce fruit.

PAUSE

Now, as I was thinking about this concept of pruning, I got to wondering about our own lives.

I got to wondering about whether we periodically prune our lives.

I got to wondering about whether we examine our lives every once in a while...

Whether we take a good hard look at our lives on occasion and think about where we might do a little pruning.

Where we might do a little cutting away of certain aspects of our lives.

Where we could remove the parts that are not contributing to a fruitful life.

Have we done that recently?

Have we examined our life and considered where we need to trim, to prune, to crop, to snip, and otherwise cut back, cut away, or cut out that which is not providing growth to our lives?

Have we done that recently?

Maybe, maybe not.

Now maybe we are needing to prune certain activities from our lives that we just don't have time for and which have ceased to be a blessing to our lives.

Maybe we are needing to prune certain behaviors from our lives, things like too much time on our phones.

Maybe we are needing to prune certain foods from our diet, or prune certain bad habits from our routine, or prune certain attitudes that we have toward others.

And maybe we are needing to prune certain people from our lives because don't like who we become when we are around them, or because they poison us with their cynicism.

Maybe we are needing to prune certain television programs from our TV watching because those programs only rile up our emotions.

Maybe we need to prune certain feelings from our person, like hate, or fear, or greed, or self-importance, so that humility, love, and compassion can blossom.

Yes, there is a lot of pruning that we can do in our lives.

And it is good, it is even necessary that everyone once in a while take the time to examine his or her life and think about what is working and what isn't working.

And that which isn't working may need to be pruned.

PAUSE

And as necessary as it is for us as individuals to prune our lives.

As important as it is for us to prune all that affects us negatively in our own lives.

So it is also necessary for families, for businesses, for schools, for faith communities, to do some pruning as well.

Organizations and institutions, various people groups also need to prune.

Whatever may not be working may have to be cut away.

Whatever is keeping those people groups from growing to their full potential may have to be removed.

Whatever does not bear fruit may have to be trimmed.

Perhaps, it is certain programs that have not panned out the way it was hoped they would.

Perhaps, it is certain property that is a drain on the budget to maintain.

Perhaps, it is personnel, which is never an easy decision.

Pruning is something then that not only we as individuals do with respect to our own lives, but it also something organizations, institutions, and people groups do.

Even our society does pruning on a much larger scale.

As of late, we have watched our society prune racial injustice.

We have watched our society prune bigotry and prejudice.

And there is still a lot of pruning that needs to be done on this front.

And where else does society need to prune?

We need to prune those things which contribute to the growing problem of economic inequality in the country.

We need to prune those things which contribute to inequality in educational opportunities.

We need to prune things like xenophobia and homophobia.

And we need to prune things like sexism and misogyny.

We need to prune all these things, Friends, because when we do...

When we cut away the fear, the hate, the greed, and self-importance, again it allows for humility, love, and compassion to blossom.

Not only in ourselves but within our very culture, pruning is most important.

PAUSE

Sisters and brothers in Christ, how then do we learn to prune?

How do we learn to trim and cut away that which is dead and not producing fruit?

How do we learn to do this?

We observe how our Lord Jesus Christ cut away that which is dead and not producing fruit.

We observe Jesus on the cross, where he cut away the sin and power of death that infected creation and our very being.

The ancient Romans thought they were ridding the world of a criminal when they crucified Jesus.

The ancient Romans probably thought they were doing a little necessary pruning when they executed Jesus on the cross.

But lo and behold, there on the cross, God was pruning the world of sin and death.

It was God the Father who was pruning, cutting away that which was dead and not bearing fruit.

It was God the Father, the great vintner who pruned on the cross, who pruned on that tree, and God made room such that life and resurrection could come into full bloom.

God the Father is the great gardener, and he does his best pruning through the power of his Son Jesus Christ.

PAUSE

And so it is, sisters and brothers in Christ, that we come here.

So it is that we come here and we let God do a little pruning in our lives.

It is here that we come and we confess our sins, and we seek God to heal us, to prune those things that are burdens on our life.

It is here that we come and we listen to God's word that we may blossom in God's grace.

It is here that we come and we gather with one another.

It is here that we come and we worship together.

It is here that we come and we are growing in God's love because we are abiding in Christ.

We find here in worship that we are truly bound to the trunk of the grape vine.

We find here that we are sustained by the power of Christ's Spirit flowing through the branches like so much sustenance that flows through the branches of a grape vine.

We find here that we are made to bear fruit.

Yes, sisters and brothers in Christ, we are made to bear fruit.

Like a grape vine is made to bear grapes. Like an apple tree is made to produce apples. Like a tomato plant is made to produce tomatoes.

You and I were made to bear fruit, the fruit of God's love.

For a fruit vine or fruit tree to do anything else than to produce the fruit for which it was made, calls to question whether that vine or tree actually is what God intended it to be.

In the same way, for us human beings to do anything else than to produce the fruits of love, calls to question whether we truly are what God has intended us to be.

We were made to bear the fruit of God's love, pure and simple, like a grape vine is made to produce grapes.

But in order for us to bear much fruit, a little pruning is always necessary.

And so I pray, that God would prune yours and my life so that that which is not working to give us life, such that that which drains the life from us, may be removed.

And so that we can then blossom, and grow, and fulfill our calling in life to bear much fruitful love, even as we abide and grow in Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God. Amen.