

# Clean Through the Word

by

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Jesus walks with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where he would be betrayed. As he walks towards certain death, he talks with his disciples one more time.

**“I am the vine,”** he says **“and my Father is the vinedresser.”**

A pruned grapevine is an unremarkable looking plant: rough, gnarled, and twisted. Left to itself, the vine is unproductive. The vinedresser must attack the ground around the vine, loosening the soil, perhaps cutting the surface roots so that the roots that remain will grow deep into the earth.

If it could, the vine would protest against the vinedresser. “Don’t come at me with that hoe! Put down that mattock! Don’t put that nasty, smelly manure around me!” But the vine would be wrong. The vinedresser knows exactly what the vine needs if the branches are to bear fruit.

The earthly powers would soon array themselves against our Lord. The people would despise and reject him. He would soon be nailed to a cross and die a criminal’s death, numbered with the sinners. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus would soon protest this treatment to his Father, begging him to let this cup pass. But the vinedresser would not relent. What the vinedresser was doing to the vine had to be done.

The cross was the means the Father used to bring our Lord into his glory, to begin his reign, to be acknowledged and believed on throughout the world. The cross was necessary for the branches to bear fruit.

**“Every branch in me that doesn’t bear fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it, so that it may produce more fruit.”**

Soon after the grapes have been picked, the vinedresser begins to prune the branches. The vinedresser knows which branches were unproductive and cuts them off. He removes the suckers and shoots which suck the life from the branches. The old growth is pruned back so far that it seems the branches could never bear fruit again. The branches are then tied against a trellis that trains them to grow the way the vinedresser requires. The vinedresser is preparing the branches to produce much fruit.

The branches would resist this treatment if they could. The shoots and the suckers would protest that they were part of the true vine. The branches that were unproductive would protest that the vinedresser was being unfair and was expecting too much. The productive branches, would protest as well. “Why are you being so harsh with us,” they might ask. “Haven’t I served you well?” And yet the vinedresser knows exactly what the branches need.

Jesus says, **“Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”**

As Jesus walked to the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing what awaited him, and knowing that his disciples would soon desert him, he pronounced them clean. Only the Word of Christ made them clean. The actions of the disciples meant nothing. Only the spoken Word mattered.

Pastors are one of the means God uses to prune his people, through His tools of Word and Sacrament. At the seminary, we form pastors and equip them to use His tools: the proper proclamation of the Gospel, and the right administration of the Sacraments. Our pastors use His tools of Word and Sacrament for your benefit, to the glory of God the Father.

Through the proclamation of the Gospel made by faithful pastors, the Holy Spirit works in you to create saving faith. In Baptism your sins are forgiven, you are delivered from death and the devil, and eternal salvation is given to all who believe. In the Sacrament of the Altar the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are granted to us.

Jesus says, **“In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples.”**

The vinedresser cares for the branches, but not for their own sake. He cares for the branches so they will bear good fruit. The fruit is then turned into wine. When the vinedresser does a good job, the wine will be very good. Good vinedressers, good vintners, are well known and are highly praised.

So too our fruits are no reflection upon ourselves, for we have no life in us apart from the cross. Our service of God manifests the life of Christ abiding in us. When we bear our spiritual fruit, it is solely to the glory of God the Father. In the words of John the Baptist, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

Thanks be to God. Amen.