

I AM...

The True Vine Frankton – 3/13/16

Scripture: John 15.1-8 Jesus Is the True Vine

Proposition: The vine bears fruit (us).

Two guys were out hunting and come upon what appeared at first to be an abandoned farm. The barn was sagging, the house was in disrepair, and there were junk cars and car parts lying around. The only thing that made it look like a working farm was a few chickens pecking away and a goat wandering around. As they entered the yard, they came across an old well. One asked the other "Wonder how deep it is." The other said, "We'll have to drop something down and listen for the splash." They look around for something to drop down the well, but the only thing close by was an old transmission. They both hauled it over to the well and dropped it in. They counted and waited a long time for the splash. It was deep, deep one all right. They turned to leave and saw the goat was charging at them, head down, horns headed straight for them. At the last moment, they jumped aside, and the goat went right past them and straight over the side and down the well. They looked at each other in amazement. As they started to leave, the owner of the farm came up. They chatted for a moment and got permission to hunt on his land. The farmer asked, "Have you seen my goat?" They said, "Your goat almost killed us charging at us, but went into the well. You should have had that goat tied up." The farmer said, "I thought I had him tied up to an old transmission." LESSON: You follow what you're tied to.

We are continuing a Lenten sermon series that I have titled: [SLIDE] I AM. For the seven Sundays in Lent, we are studying the "I am" sayings of Jesus that occur in the gospel of John. In seven different situations, Jesus refers to himself as something by saying "I am..." So far, we have learned that Jesus used the Hebrew word "haya" (hay-yaw) which is the same word God used when introducing himself to Moses. In other words, he was claiming to be God. Here's the list of I AMs: light, gate, good shepherd, bread of life, true vine, way, and resurrection. We've already talked about Jesus being the light in a world of darkness. We've talked about Jesus being the human gate that guards us. We've talked about Jesus being the good shepherd that tenderly cares for his sheep to the point of sacrificing his life for his sheep. Last week, we talked about Jesus as the bread of life. Today we will teach about another of the "I AM" statement that Jesus made.

So let's pick up the action in John 15. It's Passover time in Israel. In fact, it's Passover night in Israel. Jesus and his disciples have just finished the Passover meal, the Seder, which started with Jesus washing the feet of all the disciples – an event the disciples didn't really like or understand. Jesus has already blessed and shared bread with the disciples saying they should do this as often as they eat it in remembrance of him. He did the same thing with a cup of wine. Judas has already left the group to set up the betrayal. And now Jesus and the remaining disciples have finished the Seder meal. After they leave the Upper Room they head toward the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus wants to stop and pray. (And we all know what else will happen in the Garden, Judas will betray Jesus with a kiss.) The disciples just think they are on the way back to Bethany, about a mile away, where they will spend the night. As they are passing through the Kidron Valley, they can see Jerusalem on their left as they pass by the south end of the walled city.

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The group evidently passes near some grape vines, which are pretty normal things in the Kidron Valley. Jesus, ever the teacher, knows this will be his last chance to teach his disciples. Jesus may have picked one up and begin teaching scriptures that would have been familiar to the disciples. Scriptures such as Psalm 80 where David painted a picture of the fruitfulness of Israel. Speaking to God, David writes: *You brought us from Egypt like a grapevine....* [8] Next He may have taught on Jeremiah 2 where God speaks: *But I was the one who planted you, choosing a vine of the purest stock - the very best.* [21]

It was probably in this setting that He makes his next claim, his next "I AM" statement: [SLIDE] *Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches.* [SLIDE] *Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.* He would have made the point that Israel failed to produce the refreshing fruit. His claim: I AM the vine, not Israel. I AM the vine, not the traditions of Israel. I AM the vine, not the rituals of Temple worship. I AM the vine, not the sacrifices in the Temple courtyard. I AM the vine.

We must understand the necessity of the clarity to his followers that no longer would their past religion be sufficient. These guys were Jewish. They would have been steeped in their traditions, rituals, and sacrifices. They would have considered these things to be the life giving nutrients for their spirituality. Jesus needed to be sure they understood that he was the vine that would provide what their religion failed to provide.

We can look back at Christmas not too long ago and can be reminded that only Jesus can state, "I AM the vine." Jesus is the vine not traditions. The world is filled with Christmas traditions. We spend more. We eat more. We decorate our homes and trees. Some radio stations dedicate their entire format to Christmas music every year. Most churches concentrate on singing Christmas hymns, doing Christmas cantatas, hanging the greens, lighting Advent candles, having Christmas Eve services and other things. When asked why the response is mostly "it's tradition" or "We've always done it that way." We celebrate the birth of Jesus at a time that a lot of scholars say is the wrong time of the year. (There are a lot of pretty sound reasons for this claim, but I'm not going to bore you with them.) Yet, we continue to do so in the name of tradition. What if we decorated for Christmas right now as Easter approaches? People would call us kooks. Why? Because tradition dictates that we decorate for Christmas in December.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not the Grinch wanting to steal your next Christmas. But when we allow our traditions to overshadow the True Vine then we are no longer remaining in him, the True Vine. Everyday should be Christmas Day for us. We should give of our resources every day of the year. We should have carols in our hearts proclaiming his birth even though we are in the middle of Lent. We should spread the good news of his arrival 365 days a year.

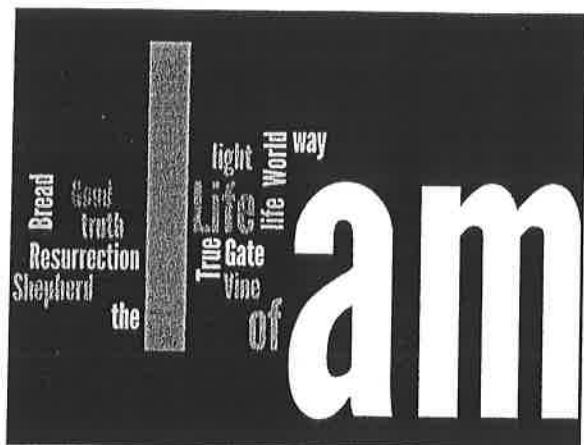
The Jews had plenty of rituals. They followed 613 commandments. They were required to pray 3 times a day. Solitary prayer was acceptable but it was better to be in a group of at least ten. Their food had to be kosher, that is acceptable to God. Our church can also become a place of rituals. We come in, greet each other, sing three songs, hear the word, maybe do a closing song, and then leave with a challenge to make a difference. What if we heard the word first? What if we had a service of just music? What if in the middle of my teaching someone stopped me to ask a question? If we change the routine, would someone get upset? Possibly, I guess. Maybe we too have become creatures of tradition.

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[SLIDE] Jesus is the vine. Jesus, in his statement, “I AM the vine” is making it clear that like the roots of the vine anchor the vine, nothing can anchor us, but him. Like the roots of a vine that provide the provisions the vine needs, it is through him that we receive all of our provision. It is through him that, when tragedy strikes our lives and we feel as if we are in the dead of winter, he provides us with comfort and hope. Like the roots of the vine that provide energy for the vine, through him, we get our energy to serve God. Like the fruit of the vine provides the way for the vine to reproduce, through him, we can effectively reproduce the kingdom. It is through our vine, Jesus, that we became branches by his choosing.

[SLIDE] Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. It is the branches that produce the grapes. We are to produce the fruit. We are to remain in him. Unlike a real branch on a grapevine, we can choose to break ourselves free. It is dangerous to not remain in Jesus. A grafted in branch would have been better off staying a wild branch than experiencing the grace of the true vine and deciding to break free. A branch that breaks off just becomes a withered branch set to be gathered and thrown into a pile to be burned. It is our nature to produce sour grapes. It is only when we surrender ourselves to Jesus that our grapes become sweet.

So surrender. Allow Jesus to be your true vine. Get your sustenance from him. Get all nourished up, and then go and bear fruit.



Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches.

Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.

