

May 2, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 5: 1-7; John 15: 1-8

Title: “The Right Connection”

After Elvis Presley died in 1977, a lot of people started claiming to be related to him. Tabloids published stories with headlines like “I was Elvis’ love child!” Some of these claims were made by fans who were in grief over his death and were desperate to maintain some connection with him. But some were simply looking for a chance at publicity or to get some money from his estate.

Claiming a connection to Elvis Presley became so popular that someone started selling fake birth certificates for people who wanted to claim that Elvis was their dad. About 2,000 people paid \$2 apiece for these fraudulent birth certificates. I wonder many would go for such a thing today?

People will do some strange things won’t they? But, I have to remember how often **I’m** tempted to base my identity on things of this world. For instance, have I ever embellished my connections to people of power and significance in order to make me look more “important?” What I’m talking about is how we sometimes try to make ourselves look rich or higher on the social ladder, stuff like that. Social media, Facebook and the like allows us the opportunity to create an image of ourselves that may not be entirely true. We can even now doctor up photos to make us look more appealing.

Where do you find your identity? Because your identity—who or what you identify with—shapes your life. It impacts our values and choices and relationships. This morning, Jesus gives us what I call our “birth certificate”—our

identity—and it’s not a fake and it’s out of this identity that we find our best purpose for living if we really and truthfully claim it. “I am the vine,” said Jesus, “and you are the branches.” He says, “You’re connected to me. And you’re not just connected to me—you are now a part of my substance. You’re not alone. Your life isn’t random or meaningless. The divine nature, the wisdom, the life, the joy that flows through me now flows through you!”

**Jesus is the vine. It’s he that nourishes our hungry spirits.** But of course our hungry spirits are so often looking elsewhere for nourishment. And these other things usually prove in the end to be worthless.

In the 1930s when the Great Depression devastated families across this nation, a young mother named Mary had a crisis of faith, a crisis of identity. She and her husband had five kids to feed. After his pay was cut, Mary took in laundry and ironing to make a little money. But it wasn’t much and they were barely scraping by. One day, the local grocer accused her oldest son of stealing food. If you’ve ever felt like your life was spinning out of control, and you can’t see any hope for the future, then you understand the dark place Mary was in.

She went home, turned on the gas heater in the house, lay down on the bed with her youngest daughter, and waited for the gas to kill them all. But as they lay there in the quiet, Mary heard the radio playing in the kitchen. She had forgotten to shut it off. And the song it was playing was “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

This song was written in the 1800s by a young man who had suffered some terrible tragedies himself. And yet, he was able to write the words, “What a

Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!”

Mary says that as she listened to the song, “. . . I realized that I had made a tragic mistake. I had tried to fight all my terrible battles alone... I jumped up, turned off the gas, opened the door, and raised the windows.” She spent the rest of the day in prayer and in thanking God for the blessings they had.

Now they still had lots of problems. They lost their house. But they and their children made it through the Depression. Many years later, Mary was able to look back at that day when she almost ended her life and the lives of her children and say that she is so thankful that God “woke her up” to the blessings of life.

So many of us will seek what we need elsewhere. Perhaps we’ll seek it sitting in front of a tv or staring at our smart phone hour after hour or some other indulgence of some kind. But if we believe that we’re connected to Christ. We will have power for living! It’s not our outer circumstances that determine our sense of well-being on the inside. It depends on who you are connected to.

Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. And **it’s He who also links us to one another**. Because the branches, linked to Christ, are also connected to each other. And through our connection, you and I **will bear fruit**. What does bearing fruit look like? It means that all our actions are motivated by and reflect the spirit and character of Jesus. It mean that the spirit of, the life of Jesus inspires us. Not just our actions in church but everywhere else including when we’re alone and

nobody's looking.

The message this morning? Don't settle for a mediocre life. Do a personal inventory. Are you bearing fruit for Christ or are you stuck and disconnected? You can't put a stick back on a grapevine (at least I don't think so.) But, praise God, you can reconnect with Christ. Amen.