

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on John 15:1-5**  
**Theme: “We are the church...”**  
**“Remain united to Jesus and bear much fruit”**  
**\*Multicultural Service**

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***Introduction:***

I've have an old leaflet, or *tract*, entitled, “What is the church?” “Is it just a building?”

“Is the church a denomination like Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist, and so on?” “Is a museum to show off in, a museum for ‘nice’ people, or ‘religious people’, or people who claim to be ‘good’ or even ‘perfect’?”

You know, people who have had very little to do with the church see the church simply as a sort of club for ‘religious’ people, a club for people who are trying to ‘do good’ in order to win God’s approval, and who think that they are a little better than the average Aussie.

Well, are they right? Is the church simply a club for ‘religious’ people? Is it a place where people who like to think of themselves as ‘good’ people go on Sundays?

***Part 1: Images of what the church is***

Well, no!! Most definitely not! This may be the way that many of your friends see the church, but it certainly isn’t what the church really is.... The church is purely and simply *all* those who are linked to Jesus Christ, the Son of God *through our Baptism and our faith in him as our Saviour*.

This is the emphasis that comes through from Jesus himself, and from the writers of the New Testament letters *who echo Jesus*. Jesus, and the writers of the New Testament do this by using a number of pictures or images:

\* **Jesus as the shepherd, & us as his sheep**

In John, chapter ten, Jesus describes himself as “the good shepherd”, and us the church as his sheep. The church, Jesus says are “my sheep who listen to my voice...and who follow me” (*John 10:27; cf. John 10:11, 14-15*).

\* **Jesus as the vine, & us as the branches**

This is the image is found in our Bible reading for this morning. Jesus pictures himself as the vine, and us as the branches who are attached to him. In fact, he says just this in verse 5:

**5 “I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me (*John 15:5*).**

We'll come back to this in a little while when we think of what God wants to say to us through these images of the church.

In the rest of the New Testament, a number of other images of “the church” are found:

\* **Jesus as the head, & us as his body**

Listen to what Paul says about Jesus and us using the image of a person, with Jesus as the head, and us as being different parts of the body:

**12 Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. 13 In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body with the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.**

**27 All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it (*1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27*).**

\* **Jesus as the cornerstone, & us as his building**

And I love the picture of the church that Paul gives us in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus:

**19 So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and**

members of the family of God. <sup>20</sup> You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. <sup>21</sup> He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord (*Eph. 2: 19-21*)

\* **Jesus as the husband, & us as his bride**

Later on in that same letter, Paul changes the picture. In chapter five of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul likens the relationship between the church, *that's us!*, and Jesus to that of a relationship between a wife and her husband. Listen to what Paul says:

**<sup>32</sup> There is a deep secret truth revealed in this scripture, which I understand as applying to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> But it also applies to you: every husband must love his wife as himself, and every wife must respect her husband (*Eph. 5:32-33*).**

All these pictures have one thing in common: they depict the church as those who belong to Jesus, those who are linked to him through faith. This then is what the church is: the church is those who are linked to Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord through faith, and through him have God's ongoing forgiveness (*cf. Statement in the tract, "What is the church?"*)

***Part 2: God's message to us***

Well, what's God saying to us this morning, as we look at these various pictures of the church, *and as we look in particular at the picture of Jesus as the vine and us as the branches?*

**1) Stay linked to Jesus**

Jesus in his picture of him and us as the vine and the branches makes this very clear. As long as we remain linked to Jesus as a branch is to the vine we are God's forgiven children.

But if we as *branches* break away from Jesus who is *the vine*, then we will die, and become shrivelled up branches, so to speak.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. This gum tree branch is green and alive and flourishing at the moment, because a short time ago it was joined to a gum tree. But in a few days time, this

branch will be all withered and dead. Why? Because it is no longer linked to the gum tree.

And it's the same with us and Jesus. If we break away from Jesus, *through whom we have forgiveness, "life in all its fullness",* and a certain hope for the future, then we will certainly wither and die. Not literally, *well not immediately anyway.* But certainly inside we will wither and die, overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, despair, and hopelessness.

## 2) Bear the fruit of love

This is Jesus' main emphasis, in fact, as he uses the image of the vine and the branches. Listen again to what Jesus says:

**4 Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me....** <sup>12</sup>**My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you** (*John 15:4-5, 12*).

In my files, I have an article for *The Lutheran* by Vic Pfitzner entitled "Be Sappy Branches". That's what God wants us to be: branches that remain united to Jesus so that his life-giving sap flows to us and empowers us to bear the fruit of love.

Dr. Vic Pfitzner puts it like this:

**The first lesson is clear: a vine's branches, leaves, and tendrils have life in them because of the sap that flows from the vine stock. Once joined to Christ, the believer draws on a life-juice that is not *his or her own*, but a gift. The sap flows one way – from Christ to us.**

**Further, a branch does not decide to grow; it doesn't in the first place attach itself to the vine-stock. All it can do is grow. It has one function: to be an extension of the vine, to show the life that comes from the vine.**

**So the next lesson is quite clear. We are joined to Christ, not simply to enjoy life, not just to produce green vine leaves –but to bear**

**fruit!** (Vic Pfitzner, "Sappy Branches", *The Lutheran* 6<sup>th</sup> Nov '89,, p. 12-13).

### 3) Encourage one another

Have you ever spent time counting the bricks out the front of the church, above the altar?

I remember doing this a young lad in my old church at Bridgewater....

Focus on one of those bricks, and imagine that you are "a brick in the wall". How many bricks are there around you? Count them up.

They remind you of the people who God has placed around us, *us bricks in God's building*.

These are the people that God wants you to support and encourage.

Remember what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says in his "lettuce patch" in Hebrews chapter ten. He says there:

**<sup>23</sup> Let us hold on firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. <sup>25</sup> Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer (Heb 10:23-25).**

### 4) Share the good news of Jesus

We are reminded of the need to share the good news of Jesus with our family, and our friends, and those around us, so that they too may be sheep in Jesus' flock, a brick in Jesus' wall, a member of the body of Christ....

...And my favourite, so that they too may be buds on Jesus' vine.

I love seeing new buds on our fruit trees out the back of our house. Not that I put them there, of course. It is God who enables the new buds to form and grow.

But it reminds me that this is what God wants from us: to pray for the people around us, to love them, and to share with them the good news of Jesus so that they may be new buds on Jesus' vine.

### ***Conclusion:***

I remember well a song that a group from Para Vista taught us in Geelong many years ago.

You may know it, but I want to finish off by speaking the words of its verses, *and then we might sing it if we can.*

The song goes like this:

#### *Chorus*

***We are the church, the body of our Lord;  
we are all God's children. We have been restored.***

- 1 The church is not a building  
where people go to pray;  
it's not made out of stick and stones,  
it's not made out of clay.**
- 2 You can go to worship  
but you cannot go to church;  
you can't find a building that's alive  
no matter how you search.**
- 3 The church is not a business,  
a committee or a board;  
it's not a corporation for  
the business of the Lord.**
- 4 The church, it is the people  
living out their lives,  
called, enlightened, sanctified  
for the work of Jesus Christ.**

## ***Appendix:***

It is Jesus himself who first uses this term “church” to describe those who follow him.

Listen to what Jesus says to Peter as he looks to Peter to be a leader among his disciples.

Jesus says to Peter:

**18 And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, the community of my followers, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it (Matt. 16:18).**