

Abiding in Jesus

John 15:1—8 (v. 5b)

Introduction

Verse 5b of our gospel lesson gives the sermon in one sentence: *“Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”* The underlying outline for each sermon is Goal, Malady, and Means. The goal here – to *bear much fruit*. The Malady – *apart from Me you can do nothing*. The Means – *Whoever abides in Me and I in him*. Let’s unpack this.

What Is the Fruit?

The first question is, “What is this fruit we are supposed to bear?” Growing up in an Evangelical tradition, this verse was often seen as an exhortation to witness about Jesus, to “win people to Christ.” The fruit we are to bear is other believers. The fact is, we are to tell others about Jesus, but winning them over is the work of the Holy Spirit. Fruit makes us think of the Fruit of the Spirit. Paul says that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22—23)*. Or, as the **Apology** says: *As long as faith is present, it produces good fruits (Apology, Article IV, Justification, 64)*. And as the **Explanation of the Small Catechism** says: *In God’s sight a good work is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of his or her neighbor (Explanation of the Small Catechism, The Apostles’ Creed, Article III, Q 163)*.

Clean By His Word

But we must remember, while these good works are necessary, they do not save us or prepare us for salvation in any way. Good works are the fruit of being justified by faith. Jesus says in **verse 3**, *“Already you are clean because of the Word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3)*. It is impossible for us to do good works without the Holy Spirit. We are too weak, too fallen. As the **Apology** says: *The Law cannot be obeyed unless we have been reborn through faith (Apology, Article V, Love and Fulfilling the Law, 135)*.

To Produce or Not to Produce

But let’s look at this producing of fruit. If you remember, last year we had an abundance of apples from our tree in the back yard. You might even say we had a super-abundance. We were begging people to come and take some. The suggestion was made that this year, we have an apple festival, where people in the church take apples from that tree and make their favorite apple recipes and we all share them together in a big party. Well, that’s not going to happen this year. If the number of blossoms is any indication, we won’t have enough apples to can. That’s the way apple

trees are. One year you have a bumper crop, the next year, it must rest. We can't think that good works are just going to flow.

Seasons of the Soul

Take another lesson from the apple tree. It produces one crop per year, and it is always in the same season. We have "seasons of the soul" as well. We have seasons where we are being refreshed spiritually so we can produce good works.

The Key—to Abide

The key to producing good works is to remain in Jesus. Jesus uses the word "abide" seven times in these eight verses. It's obvious that this is the main thrust of His teaching here. We are to abide in Him as the branches abide in the life-giving vine. But how do we do that?

How We Abide

Johannes Brenz, 16th Century Lutheran Theologian and pastor said: *We abide in Christ through faith; Christ abides in us through His Word* (***Exegesis on the Divine Gospel of John***). In the Divine Service, we hear the Word, so Christ abides in us. During Holy Communion, we get our faith strengthened through the eating of His body and the drinking of His blood. We have this opportunity because:

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
