

The Lord's Message: Pruning Required

Date: January 1, 2023

Where: Tilghman United Methodist Church

Scripture Reference: John 15:1-8

How many of you have made your New Year's resolutions? How many of you have already broken your New Year's resolutions? For those that have made their resolutions, maybe you resolved to be healthier, or spend more time with family or friends, or getting involved in a ministry or starting a new ministry, or spending more time with God. All of these are wonderful resolutions. To be healthier, I would assume that you would exercise more or eat healthier foods. To spend more time with family or friends, I would expect that you would invite them over or call them or email them more regularly. To get involved in a ministry, I would expect that you would talk with Susan Roecker on how you could help out with the Wednesday meal program or the First Tuesday Luncheon. If you wish to be involved in the Youth Group, you would talk with Beth, Christina, Rachel, Markie or myself. To start a new ministry, one needs to determine whether there is a need, then figure out how to address the need. One must bring their plan to the Church Council for their input. In all ministry, there must be time to evaluate the ministry. Is the ministry being effective? Maybe the ministry needs to change in order to be more effective. Maybe the ministry needs to die, because the need is no longer there. Are there other ways of doing the ministry? Just because we have done it this way does not mean that this is the most efficient way. We also need to allow others to have input into the ministry. We should train others to take over responsibilities for part or all of the ministry. To spend more time with God, I hope that you pick up an Our Daily Bread devotional this morning. I find that setting a period of time each day for God is essential for my spiritual growth. Now there is a problem. There are only 24 hours in the day. We need time to sleep, eat, and relax. Something has to give. We need the Biblical principle of "Pruning."

Let us pray.

In order to spend more time with another activity, some other activity has to give. Pruning is required. Pruning away some other activity to make room for the new activity. Pruning is an ancient practice that has been used for years to produce healthy fruit. Fruit trees are pruned, so that there is room for an abundant and healthy crop. Jesus related our fruitful and productive lives with God to fruit trees.

If you have a Bible, please open it to **John 15**. He starts off in **verse 1** making the connection of Himself as being the vine and His father as the gardener. He is the vine. God is the gardener, the pruner, or in some translations, the vinedresser. In **verse 5**, Jesus makes the connection of us as the branches. He says that in order for us to produce fruit we need to stay connected to Him. In **verse 6**, he tells us what will happen to us if we do not stay connected to Him. In much the same way a branch that is detached from the vine dies, if we are detached from Jesus we die spiritually as well. The result of branches being detached from the vine “are thrown into the fire and burned.” The same happens to our spiritual life with God. When we detach ourselves from God, then our spiritual life dies. We then try to fill it with more work, more pleasure, more of everything else and in the end the void is never filled. This leads us to great disappointments, tremendous stress, and bad choices. We end up feeling we are not worthy of God’s love and are unlovable. Those feelings need to die. None of us are worthy of God’s love, it is only through the action of Jesus dying on the cross that we are saved. It is only His act of redemption that makes us worthy. We are all loved by God.

Too much of a good thing is not a good thing. Just as vines and trees can grow branches after branches, our lives can be filled with many good activities. So much that we are stretched thin to the point of breaking. That is why a good gardener will prune off the weak and competing branches, so that the good branches may produce fruit. The weaker branches do not bear healthy or abundant fruit. Too many leaves or overgrowth from good and healthy branches causes less healthy and abundant fruit. That is why Jesus says in verse 2 that the pruner cuts off the branches that bear no fruit and prunes the ones that are good and healthy fruit bearing.

Another reason for the pruning of healthy branches is that when two branches cross each other they do not allow the wind and sun to dry them out. Moisture is trapped in the cross connection and the moisture leads to disease and rot. It also does not allow room for abundant fruit to grow. The same way for us, if we have too many activities in our lives, then we become stressed out. This leads to health problems as well as possible relationship problems. This also does not allow God’s Holy Spirit to move in and through our lives. In the end we are not producing good fruit for the Lord.

Pruning is always required. There may be a time for us to step back and let someone else take charge of a ministry. There may be a time when this ministry needs to die or to be redesigned. The ministry should never be about us, but always about Jesus. There may be times when we need to refocus our life on other activities. The most important is that we stay connected to the vine, **verse 4**. We listen to God to direct our lives. Pruning is required for us to bear much fruit for the Lord, **verse 8**. Amen.