

Message Notes November 29th, 2020

5 to Thrive

(John 15:1-5; Matthew 4:4; Proverbs 27:17; Ephesians 2:10)

- **The Vine and the Branches**

- These past two weeks we've focused on Stewardship and Vision, and last week we introduced this idea of "5 to Thrive." Today, we're going to continue talking about our vision one more time to unpack 5 to Thrive more and set us up for a New Year, before we focus on the story of Advent.
- Carey Nieuwhof is a pastor and leadership expert in Canada (he has a great podcast and blog, check it out if that interests you!). Here's a challenging statement he recently wrote that struck me: *"For too long, too many North American Christians have thought that sitting passively in the back row to get fed is what's required of them, or that the main goal of finding a church is to attend one you 'like.' The goal of any Christian should never be to find a church you like and sit in the back row. The goal should be to fully engage the mission."*
- Well, that's pretty strong: but do you agree with him? I think he is spot on. So, what is the mission? Our mission here is the same mission of every church. Although it might be worded a little differently, it comes right out of the Great Commission Jesus gave the disciples in Matthew 28. *Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our community and the world.*
 - Our mission here at Trinity Church is to become a community of *growing disciples who make other disciples*, who transform their world by the ways they live. That's the mission we are called to be *fully engaged in*. A church that is fully engaged in that mission will always be a growing church. A church that is not engaged in the mission will inevitably become a dying church.
- But how do we engage that mission, at this time and season in our church and community? This is what a *vision* is for: our vision is *Thriving in Christ* and it comes from Jesus' words in John 15.
- We just introduced this new idea of "5 to Thrive." 5 core practices to help everyone thrive. But first, I want to talk more about this imagery of *the Vine and branches* in John 15. If you want to understand our vision, basically, *Thriving in Christ* means everything this passage means. Let's reread this Scripture: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*
 - This is a profound image of what it means at the deepest level to be a follower of Jesus: *it is about living in union with Christ, that the life of God would flow through him to you, and the love of God would flow through you to others.* It means that, as a branch of that Vine, your very source of life, your identity, your purpose, your existence, depends on Jesus.
- When you take time to process this, there are at least four stark implications for our discipleship:
 - 1) *We can do nothing without him.* Trying to live a good life, a Christlike life, just relying on ourselves is like a branch breaking off from the plant and expecting to bear fruit by itself. It simply can't happen. The Christian life is fully-dependent on the grace of God from start to finish. Every step you take towards growth in Christ is taken *in and through the grace of God.* We must abide in his love if we want to follow him.
 - 2) *We're either growing or dying.* There's no happy, lukewarm middle ground here. You're either connected with Christ and growing towards fruitfulness, or you're withering and dying. "...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful...If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers..." (15:2, 6). Pruning can be challenging, but it's effective and essential. The parts of the branch that bear no fruit are sapping energy from the plant that could be going towards fruit. What are those life-suckers that drain your resources away from bearing fruit? Jesus says that his *Word* prunes and cleanses us. You're either being pruned, producing fruit and growing to more fruitfulness, or withering.

- 3) *Bearing fruit is inevitable.* This is pretty amazing; if you are abiding in him, *fruit is inevitable.* If you are living in union with Christ and submitting yourself to God's work of shaping and pruning and transforming, *you cannot help but bear fruit.* The life of God is flowing through you! There will be fruit.
- 4) *We're unavoidably connected with others.* If you're connected to the vine, you're connected to the branches. This is not a solo-thing, "Jesus and me." You cannot be abiding in the vine and not be connected to the branches: one branch's fruit is not singled out above all the others, you're all sharing the same life, part of the same organism, bearing fruit together for the glory of God. A healthy branch cannot live isolation from the other branches. We can't do this alone.
- To summarize those four points again, if you go back and read over John 15: First, *we can do nothing without him.* Second, *we're either growing or we're dying.* Third, *if we're abiding in him, fruit is inevitable.* Fourth, *if we're abiding in him, connection with other disciples is unavoidable.*
- This is why it's so important that "Thriving in Christ" becomes for us more than just a "vision statement" but a *lifestyle.* This is why we're taking intentional time to talk about this and we regularly revisit it to help figure out ways to *live it.* This is why we're challenging everyone with "5 to Thrive" and asking you to make this commitment to growth and stewardship in 2021.
- **5 to Thrive**
 - The goal is that all of us would be fully engaged in the mission, by seeking to *thrive in Christ.* And to do this, we need more than just talk. We need action. 5 to Thrive is about giving us 5 simple, core practices that will give all of us the foundation on this journey of growth. This list is not exhaustive or exclusive to other ways that might help you grow in Christ, it's just a foundational place to start. Some of you might already be doing all of these. Some of you might be doing 2 or 3 consistently. Some of you might just be getting started. It's OK wherever you are today, the point is that we take steps forward. The five practices are: 1) Pray & Read, 2) Worship, 3) Fellowship, 4) Give & Serve, and 5) Invite. And to finish today I want to break each one of these down to give us ideas of how to implement them.
 - You might have noticed on the cards we gave you that we gave a QR code and a link to a page on our website devoted to this. Throughout the year, we're going to be sharing encouragement, inspiration, and new ideas for how you might try to work these habits into your life.
 - **Pray & Read:** Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)
 - If Thriving in Christ is about *relationship and abiding in Christ*, what's the most important thing about a relationship? It's about *presence and communication.* We communicate with God, we hear from God, we get to know God, through Prayer and Scripture. And we need more than just a vicarious dose of these through a pastor and a worship team. We need *daily time with God.* So, the first thing is pray and read, every day. Every day we need to spend time talking and listening to God in prayer and Scripture. It's not so much about establishing a prayer life, but growing *a life of prayer.* It's not so much about getting into the word, but letting the word *get into you.* Find what works for you: a favorite daily devotional that's based on Scripture, a Bible reading plan, journaling with Scripture, memorizing a key verse and reflecting on it, putting Scripture notes around your daily routines. If you want to live in deep union with Christ, then you need to saturate your life with His Words and with Prayer. It doesn't take the discipline of a monk, it's just about simple, everyday choices of what you surround yourself with. Deuteronomy 6 says the Words of God are to be "on our hearts," we are to impress them on our children, talk about them at home and along the way of our comings and goings, place them as symbols around our homes.
 - 2020 for us was a year of prayer where we really focused on growing our prayer life, and 2021 is going to be the year of the Bible. We're giving everyone these simple and easy tools to read through the Bible together in one year. We're using this amazing program called "The Bible in One Year," so you have a direct action step to take this journey together with the whole church.

- Next, **Worship:** “Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:2-3)
 - Remember what we said earlier about John 15: *you cannot be rooted in the vine of Christ without being interconnected with the other branches*. We are meant to be part of a worshiping community. I know we like to say around here “Don’t just go to church, *be the church*.” But it will be hard to know how to be the church if you don’t regularly go to church. We need to gather together with God’s people to worship regularly, weekly, to help keep that compass oriented on True North. It can be online worshiping with your family, it can be in a small house church in someone’s living room, it can be in a beautiful sanctuary—it can be in a parking lot in November! We need worship to be part of the rhythm of our lives: to gather with others to hear the word, pray together, sing together, give together, share the Lord’s Supper together, and remember that we are set apart to live for God’s mission each day.
- **Fellowship:** “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)
 - We need more than just large gatherings. We need *relationships*. There is no discipleship without relationship. If you want to grow, you need to not just gather with a group of people to worship God: you need *at least one* relationship in your life that is focused on discipleship. It could be monthly, it could be weekly. It could be a mentor who’s more mature in their faith who helps you grow. It could be a peer, an accountability friend, where you encourage each other, challenge each other, pray with each other. It could be a small group where you *share life together*. It could be a discipleship band. Whatever it looks like, you need a discipling relationship in your life that is personal and strong enough that you cannot hide behind a religious mask and you are willing to be lovingly challenged towards maturity.
- **Give & Serve:** “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)
 - The more you grow in this relationship with God and other disciples, the more you will see fruit come out of your life that is for the sake of others. The goal of the Christian journey is a life of ever-growing trust, and generosity, and surrender—because this is the character of Christ. The more you grow in Christ, the more your life will be defined by giving and serving. Selflessness. Inside the church and outside the church. At the same time, if you want to grow in generosity and servanthood, you don’t simply wait for it to happen: just start practicing *giving and serving*. There are so many opportunities in our world and in our community to partner with what God is already doing: to serve his mission of bringing redemption and justice into a world of brokenness and darkness. To build your life on a foundation of generosity and service rather than complacency and selfishness. Give and serve.
- **Invite:** “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (1 Peter 3:15)
 - This is the weakest one for most of us, I think. Just like the pinky is the weakest finger for most of us. We have to be intentional with this one to grow. This is where we begin to take what God has done in our lives and multiply it into the lives of others. “Go and make disciples.” You don’t have to make it over-complicated and you don’t have to put immense pressure on yourself: *just invite others to come along!* Pray about those people in the sphere of your life who God is calling you to extend His invitation to: invite people to church, invite people to small group or prayer service, invite people to pray with you, invite people to share their story with you, invite people to this journey with you, invite people to the Kingdom of God the way God invited you!
- **2021 Commitment**
 - I want to ask you again, do you want this? Do you want to grow, do you want to thrive? Will you commit to this with us in 2021? Reflect and pray on the ways God is calling you to take steps forward in these 5 areas: I want to challenge us to take this home and over the next few weeks, think of one new step you could take in each of these 5 areas for the year to come. Decide one concrete action you could commit to, and then share it with someone (that could be part of the

Fellowship piece). Pray about your finances and ask not, "What can I give once everything is left over?" but rather, "What is God calling me to give and how can I construct a lifestyle that makes this generosity possible?" Take these commitment cards home, pray and reflect on them personally and as a family, make a choice and make a commitment, then as an act of faith with our whole church, bring the card back and we'll make a display showing all these commitment cards like leaves on a tree, representing a church that is *thriving in Christ*. Let's pray.