

### **John 15:1-11**

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

### **“Branches and Fruit”**

**Rev. Susan Warren**

**May 16, 2010**

As Chuck mentioned to you, my name is Susan Warren, and I am the senior pastor at Wellington United Methodist Fellowship, just north of here, and before I get started this morning I would like to say two things. First of all, there was only water in that bottle I just took a swig out of, and I want you to all know that we ain't in Kansas any more. I would like to give you a quick update on Wellington. We have much to be proud of and to be blessed with. On May the 5<sup>th</sup>, we closed on a building, so we are the proud owners now of 3,500 square feet, right off of Highway 1, as you're going into Wellington. We invite you to come by any time, and trust me, we will be inviting you a lot, to come and join us. It is raw on the inside, so there will be lots of opportunity to work and to volunteer, and to be with us as we move forward in our own story of being in Wellington.

It is a story that could not have started, as Chuck has mentioned earlier, without all of you, and we are so blessed and so grateful, for you see, we would not have been, if there had not been a dream of someone else's to start us in Wellington. We have around 60 that worship with us now each Sunday. We have a wonderful plan for a vacation Bible school coming up, to help us be introduced in our new facility, and again, we invite you all to come at any time and partake of being of Jesus' followers and of the family of God. I asked them to put a traveling mic on me, because I don't stand still well, so I will be moving around, just to give you a little bit of a warning on that.

Our Scripture reading this morning is from the Book of John, Chapter 15, verses 1 through 11. (reads passage above) The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Amen. Fruits and vines, vines and branches. I had an opportunity earlier this morning to be in the 8:00 service, and we had a chance to do an official sendoff, as you all did this morning, to those folks who are going to San Francisco. They are the branches that are going forth from the vine. I am married to a baseball fan, and a Cub fanatic. If you have never had the opportunity to go see Wrigley Field, I invite you to do so. It is a glorious sight, for, you see, on the out wall during the summertime, is vines. It is

beautiful, truly beautiful. But you see it as not only beautiful in the summer, it is even beautiful in the fall and in the winter. For though the vines may not be green, they have not died. They have only become dormant, and I think that's like a lot of us. Jesus knows and understands that as human beings, there are times in our life when we become dormant. We forget, or we become so busy with everything else that's going on in our life, we forget what should be most important, which is our relationship with God. We get so busy that we can't attend church. We can't partake in the groups that we had partaken in before. We become dormant.

But as that ivy and that vine that grows in Wrigley Field, so we too can be resurrected, for we are not lost. God is the vine-grower. God is the source. Jesus is not telling us that we should only worship Jesus. Jesus is telling us that we should worship God, for God is the source of all that we do. Jesus is the vine, and all of us sitting in this room are the branches. Those young folks, and the three more not so young, that we sent forward to go to San Francisco, are the branches of the vine. What an opportunity for us.

One of the things I love so much about the United Methodist system is that we are connected. We are connected to you, and we are connected to every other Methodist church around the world. We are the vine that has sent those folks to San Francisco, but they will be received warmly by the United Methodists there. If they were to have any need, they know exactly where they can go. They will go to a United Methodist church. For very similar to the vines that are on the back field of Wrigley, we are those vines. We are that connected, we are that interwoven, that you cannot separate us, and once we are in that relationship with each other, we are then in a stronger relationship with God. How can we be anything but? When we come together as a community of faith, we strengthen each other in our love and in our compassion and in our relationship with God. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches.

I invite those who are sitting here today to also feel what those folks are feeling, as they are ready to get on an airplane. They are going to do mission work. Wellington is mission work. Stepping outside these doors onto the sidewalk, you have an opportunity to do mission work. There are those in the world today who have no place to go. They are lost. They are hurt and they are suffering, and they believe that they can only deal with this by themselves. I challenge you to be that person that goes forward from this place to say, "You do not have to do that. I know a place where you can come. I know a place where you will be welcome. I know a place where you will be safe, and I invite you to come." That's all Jesus ever said to us, was, "I invite you to come, come and see." And I have to tell you that I have such a great thing going that I can't wait to go up to someone and say, "I want you to come. I want to share what I have, I want to share what I know, and I want to share with you the community of faith. I want you to come." Sometimes that's all it takes, is the invitation. We get so wrapped up in what the response might be, we forget to just make the invitation. They may say no, but they may not. This is your opportunity to be the branch.

I think there is such a chance for us to make a difference in the world. You all have made that in Wellington. We cannot thank you enough for what you have done for us there, and

we then as a community of faith, and as a group of believers, have a chance to make a difference again and again and again. I think that there is safety and encouragement in the thought that God is the vine-grower, is always there. That Jesus and the resurrected Christ are the vine. That we are their extensions. We are to be their eyes and their ears and their hearts and their hands. That's all we're asked to do.

As you go forth from this place today, I challenge you. Be so sure in the thought that you are indeed the branch that is supported by the vine that is at the root, and that God is at that root. Leave this place so sure of who you are in God, that you can't wait to go out and invite someone to come. Be just like that vine at the back of the field, and grow and grow and grow. Nothing will give you greater pleasure than knowing that you have been of service to someone who is in need, and that you have done it through the love of God. Let us pray.

Gracious God, we come before you as branches. Some are full, some are green, some are lush, some are dormant. Give us the strength to recognize that you are indeed the vine-grower, that you are always by our sides, and that you are asking us to be in your service, and to invite others to come. Amen.

Would you please join me now in singing Hymn #593, and I would like to make an invitation to you. On the second page of this song, the words are, "Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling." I would like to invite you to change those around, and instead of asking the question, make the declaration, that "It is I, Lord."