

## Bearing Much Fruit

B-Easter 5: 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

April 29, 2018, Robert Woody

***Sermon-in-a-Sentence:** Because God loves us, and through God's love for us, we are able and must love one another.*

### Children's Sermon:

Who or What is God? Have you ever "seen" God? According to the letter, John wrote to the early church, that we read a moment ago, "**God is love.**" Maybe if you've seen love, you've seen God"? Have you ever actually seen "love"? Have you felt it?

Here's more from John's letter, "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." Then later John says, "No one has ever seen God, (but) if we **love one another**, God **lives** in us, and his love is perfected in us."

So if you have loved someone, you have experienced God flowing through you to the person you love. Can you give me an example of when you have really loved someone? How did it feel?

If you want to be really connected to God, what do you have to do? You have to love your family, love your friends, love your neighbor, even love strangers. When we love our family, friends, neighbors, or even our enemy, love flows through us; and God is love, so God flows through us; and we experience God. The more we love, the **more we know** and **experience** God; and the less we love, the **less we know** and **experience** God.

You could come to church every Sunday, and even go to Sunday School, but if you aren't trying to love your friends and neighbors and even those you don't like very much, you aren't going to really experience God, at least according to what our Bible readings say.

Is it easy to love one another? Sometimes, but most of the time, it's not. Especially if it's someone we don't know very well, or don't like. Love is often **not** easy, cause we have to stretch ourselves, or let go of what we want, or what we want to do, so we can help or be nice to someone else. Why would we do something like that – stretch, sacrifice? Because nothing feels better than God flowing through us.

We may have to **suffer** and **sacrifice** a lot, but if we do that and let God's love **flow** through us, we will experience something that make's us feel, on a very deep level, **very** happy and **very** loved. The happiest people I know are not the richest or most powerful people, the happiest ones are the ones who love the most.

My wife Julie is a hospice chaplain. Do you know what that is? Her job is to be with people who are dying, and their families. That is not an easy job. But when she is able to connect with and really love someone who is dying, or their families, the love of God flows through her, and she feels very blessed. She loves her job, even though it's hard and doesn't pay much.

The more you stretch and sacrifice to love someone, the more you will feel and know God's presence. Why? Because God is love.

### **Adult Sermon:**

It's not easy to bear much fruit.

I just built two raised-beds in my backyard last week. And on Monday, I hauled six wheelbarrows of soil and compost from the front driveway to my backyard to fill one raised



bed.

And then I planted some corn, tomatoes and cucumbers. And when I get the other bed filled with soil, we've already got some peas, bell peppers and watermelons to plant in the



second bed.

It's been a longtime since we've had a vegetable garden, and I'm loving it. I'm going to have to do a lot of watering and pruning, and I'm going to have to find someone to fill in when we take off in June for two weeks to go to Boston for Seth's wedding, and NYC for fun. But hopefully, we'll get a lot of good veggies, and I'll have fun gardening.

But I do have an **issue** with these raised bed gardens, that I'm really struggling with. We know some of the neighbors who live in the apartments next door.



They are mostly young adults, some in school, some married, some struggling to pay rent. We know some of them because they walk their dogs on the sidewalk in front of our house or jog by our house, and we sometimes chat a bit. But we don't know any of them very well.

We had talked to one, Justin, a few months ago, about maybe building a community



garden in the vacant lot behind our house. I had talked to the owners of the vacant lot, and they said they did not plan to do any construction for several years and they are OK with us putting some raised beds in the vacant lot. Julie and I thought that would be a great way to connect with our neighbors and maybe build some good relationships. Might even get some of our young neighbors to check out Rec.

But then it got complicated. I was **way too busy** to get much done until after Easter, and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get the community garden organized and get raised beds set up in time for "spring" planting. It was going to take a while to connect with all the neighbors and come up with a plan. And I was afraid we might end up having to spend a lot more money to help build a community garden, than we would need to spend to just have our own raised beds in our own yard. And I was afraid without a fence protecting our garden, some of our veggies might get stolen.

So, I decided to just build the raised beds now, inside our fenced back yard. Now that I've already got two raised beds in **my** backyard, I don't really need to be part of a community garden team in the vacant lot behind us.

Then it hit me at the beginning of the week, when I read the Gospel reading and the Epistle, and started thinking about this sermon. There's a great **irony** here – that the very week I'm debating in my head whether I should focus on my own fenced-in garden, or stretch to help create a community garden, I get these readings about what it looks like to bear much fruit.

The Good Life, the Kingdom of God, according to these readings is not just about having some cool raised beds growing veggies in your backyard. It's about taking the time and making the sacrifices, being willing to be pruned, so you can bear some **real fruit** with your neighbors. Even if it's more complicated, and maybe more expensive. Maybe it would cost us more financially to help our struggling neighbors to build and plant their own raised beds. But if we did, we might build some deeper relationships. We might be able to help make our neighbors lives more abundant. And the love of God would flow through us.

How do we bear much fruit? We stay connected to the vine, to Jesus, to God. And we have to be willing to be pruned. To let go of things we don't really need to live a fruitful life. Things that might be interfering with our relationship with God and with our neighbors.

We are all struggling with similar issues. We all have opportunities to stretch and reach out to our neighbors or even strangers and try to love them. But these opportunities often interfere with our "**normal**" lives. They require sacrifice, being pruned, and staying intentionally connected with the vine even when it's not easy.

The story of Phillip and the Ethiopian, *i.e.*, African eunuch, resonates with this. Phillip hears God's voice calling him to go to a wilderness desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. And who does he run into? An Ethiopian eunuch. As most of you know, Ethiopia is a country south of Egypt, in east central Africa. This man was clearly black, **and** a eunuch, castrated, **and not** Jewish. He was clearly not the kind of person that the early disciples were initially reaching out to – their Jewish friends, in Jerusalem.

And Phillip probably knew he would be deeply criticized for reaching out to a non-Jew, to a eunuch, to a black person. But it was so obvious to Phillip that this man was really trying to connect with God; that this man was reaching out to try to understand and experience who God really is on a deeper level. So Phillip stretched himself, mightily. And was willing to take on whatever criticism he might receive.

It's not easy **to bear much fruit**. But when we recognize God's love within us, and share it, our life becomes so much more **fruitful**, so much more **abundant** – even if it's more complicated and challenging.

God is love. Let God flow through you so you can bear much fruit.

Amen.