

Sermon Transcript 4/26/2020

PASTOR SCOTT: I love those two songs, and not just the two songs, but what they call us towards. It's Christ. "What a Beautiful Name" He is, "Waymaker," all rooted in the Word of God. All rooted in this good news, right, that we have Jesus. He's going to help us through anything, any storm.

It's Jesus, this incredible name. Just even to say the name, to think about his name, is everything. It's everything to us. I want to thank the team for leading us during this few moments here as we worship Him.

I want to invite you to open to John 15, as we look at God's Word this morning.

One of the questions that we had, as you're opening your Bibles there, what was up with my right hand last week? Because it never came above the table. There was all kinds of questions, you know.

Do I have, what, Cheetos? Do I have a cat under there? Like, what's going on?

So it's the mystery thing. So I actually have a clicker 'cause, this is crazy, we actually have a TelePrompTer going on, so I can control it, right? Fast forward and everything like that. Mystery is solved. Maybe we should have just kept doing this and asking every week what you think is under the table. That could have been something funny, but that's a bad idea.

So we're going to move on. Last week, we asked on Facebook,

"What five things could you go without?" Things got a little testy there, as we began, because -- and we had to do some church discipline. Once we got past that, you know, we had multiple comments. Ranae Askea said she could go without Starbucks, except when she's meeting with her friends. That was, you know, so transparent and so vulnerable. We really appreciate that, Ranae. She did say that in confidence, so don't tell Russ that at all. It's our secret.

Anyway, so going without, speaking of what gets cut out of our life, this past week -- well, our flower beds are about ten years old. We've had problems with a couple of our trees. They just don't look good. They've kind of -- I don't know, they just don't flower right. They don't look good. They're thinning in some places. We're just, eh. One isn't even growing.

We asked someone, a landscaper guy, to help us, say, "Hey, what would you do? What are you doing?"

He goes, "Hey, let me do this for you." So he went out there and says, "What you have to do is actually prune these things." We've pruned these things over the years, but what we call pruning and what he calls pruning are two different things. I mean, he came, and it was like, it was a hatchet job. I mean, he cut these things back. This one tree, like right next to our garage, he cut this thing so far back. He pulled out another tree, "That's dead. Let's just pull that out. It's not going to grow. That's gone; this is cut."

It was crazy. But he said, "Look, I'm cutting this back because what's going to happen is, this tree is going to get healthy."

You've got -- it's too big, and it's not flowering correctly. It's not blooming. It's not all these things you're seeing."

He says, "You prune this thing back this far, watch what happens. You're going to love it. You have to trust me on this."

He says, "For a season, it is going to look bare and cut back, but trust me, you're going to love what you see here when these flowers bloom."

And it got me to thinking, John 15, this famous passage. It's towards the last week of Christ's life, or it is in the last week of Christ's life. He's talking with just the 12 disciples. He says something really -- it is probably one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It is a powerful passage.

He starts off with this. He says, "I'm the true vine, and my father is the gardener."

Right there is really a radical statement, especially in the Jewish culture, because Israel was always seen in scripture as the vine and God was the gardener, the father was the gardener.

Now, Jesus is saying, "I am the true vine."

He is replacing Israel as the source and the one who God will be revealed through. Jesus, you go through Jesus to connect to God the father.

He says, "It's me. I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener." He goes on to say, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

He makes a statement here, the assumption is -- and I think we all understand that -- the assumption is, of a vine is, the goal of a vine is a bear fruit. That's why it exists. If you go to any vineyard, and you never see fruit, people will be like, "Why do you call this a vineyard, and why are you saying you'll make wine if nothing bears fruit?"

The purpose of the vine is to bear fruit, a lot of fruit, right? So Jesus is saying, "The father comes along, and He's the vine. We're the branches." He actually goes on and says that a couple more times here in these eight verses here, "I am the vine. You are the branches. I am the vine. You are the branches."

Makes it real clear, who we are and our role in this whole thing. He says, "The father will come and he'll look at a branch and see whether it is dead or not. If it's dead, he will cut it off and throw it away. If it is living, he'll prune it back so that it will be more fruitful."

So if it's a living branch and it is bearing fruit, he is going to prune it and prune it so he can get even more fruit.

Jesus says, "When you cut off" -- and they would know this. If you've had a grapevine or if you have any vines, you cut them off, the wood is useless for nothing. You pick it up, carry it to the burn pile, and you burn it. It gets burnt up. It has no potential. No use for anything. But a vine that is growing, or a branch that is growing, has potential for fruit. It's only realized as the gardener, the vineyard owner, prunes it and cares for it.

If a branch isn't pruned, what ends up happening is, all the energy will go towards a lot of growth and a lot of leaves. It'll look incredibly healthy, right? Look at that vine that has all kinds of growth. It's a huge vine. But the goal of the vine is not a lot of leaves and a lot of growth everywhere. The goal of the vine is bear fruit. And to bear fruit, you must prune it.

In fact, it looks ruthless. Like, a pruning, if you do pruning right, looks ruthless. It's awful. Just like what happened to our poor little tree out front. Just, you think there's nothing left. The

cutting that is required is staggering, but it's in that cutting and that pruning that more fruit comes.

I wonder what it looks like for you and I to understand that we're the branch, Christ is the vine, and the Father is the gardener, right now in this moment. He says this, "Look, I cut off every branch in me that bears no fruit, and I prune every branch that bears fruit so that it will be more fruitful."

In your life right now, the Father's goal for you is to bear fruit, just fruit but more fruit. As crazy as sounds for a vine and to see it happen, and not it and how ruthless it feels, it's intentional. And it carries over for us.

The pruning that happens for us in the spiritual life is incredibly important for us to bear fruit. It can happen in a number of ways. Hebrews 12 talks about how God disciplines those he loves. This pruning can come as discipline from our father. Hebrews 12 says he disciplines us for our own good, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful. So for the moment, all discipline seems painful, rather than pleasant. But later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

You hear that, the peaceful fruit of righteousness. See, our father comes into our lives, and he will cut dead branches off. He will prune back even living branches. And it's not fun. It's painful. And we would prefer to skip these ideas and these teachings that God disciplines us, but it is part and parcel of the Christian life.

That God will come in, and he will prune us. He will discipline us. It's in our disobedience and sin that he comes and says, "That's got to be cut out. That's got to be cut out."

He'll do it unannounced. He'll come in and begin to prune us. That's really painful, when we don't see it coming. There's another type of pruning that happens in our life, and it happens just because of this world and the cursed world that we live in. It comes in seasons. Like even the one we're in, where there's suffering and there's seasons of loss and seasons of suffering that come, it's nothing that we've done. It's just part of this world.

God, in the middle of it, begins to use the suffering and what it's pushing and pulling in our lives, and he begins to say,

"Hey, you need to look at this."

He prunes things out of us. He turns what was suffering and what came out of the curse, and he starts to redeem that, to prune us, prune us back. Much like a season that we're in. And it can be painful. It can be difficult. It's not easy.

And there's another way that pruning comes. And this is the one that, you know what, I think the world would say, "Are you crazy," but Christ invites us towards. It's the one where we come to him and say, "Would you prune me? Would you cut off anything? Would you see if there is anything in me?"

Psalms 139 says that, "Lord, look at my heart. Search me. Sift me. See if there is anything in me. I want it out."

It's us coming to Him and saying, "We want to bear more fruit."

We don't want to just be leafy, right? We don't just want to have all kinds of branches, or we don't want dead branches, "Cut this back. I invite you to come in as the gardener and prune my life."

It's this, "Lord, cleanse me. Lord, I submit. Don't let my heart incline to evil."

It can also be good things, "Lord, cut out anything in me."

It doesn't have to be evil. It can be good things. There's this famous story of Mary and Martha. Martha is -- or Mary is hanging out with Jesus, and Martha is over here doing not bad things, good things. She's playing host and -- hostess, rather, cooking, cleaning, doing all this stuff. She's upset with Mary because Mary is with Jesus. Jesus is like, "Look, I'm not taking away from what Mary is doing. She chose the better thing."

It is not that Martha was doing something evil, but it just wasn't as important.

Prune me. Clean me. I want to bear fruit. The theme of these three weeks is looking ahead. What does it look like, as we're moving forward. Right now, I want you to look ahead. I want you to look so far ahead that you can look back on this season that we're in. So far ahead, we can look so far ahead and plan for what is going on in this time, right?

So we're way out in the future looking back, so that we don't get to the point in the future where we say, "I wish I had. I wish I would have. I wish I just had," because now is the time to look ahead and to anticipate what the future might be.

What if we're in this season, and Christ wants to prune us? In fact, I don't think it's a what if. I think we are in a season, and it is one of the reasons why we don't feel as a staff and as a leadership, as an elders, that we're done praying. We think we're in this -- we believe we're in this season here, and it's not a moment. Like we talk about this culture being so fast-paced and just everything, get it done, move it in, get it out.

This isn't something we move out of very quickly. We're in a season. It's not a moment. You just can't blow past this. As we look ahead, we believe now is the time, in this season, to come to Christ and invite us -- or invite Him to prune us. I think all of us came into this season of shelter at home, kicking and screaming, like, "Oh, my goodness. This has been awful."

Now, we're, what, five, six weeks into this thing. What if God wants to cut off dead branches? What if God is actually opening up a moment, a season, where he's saying, "If you would let me, I could prune you. I could prune back all kinds of things. All kinds of branches that are growing off of you. All kinds of leaves where it seems like, wow, you're growing, but you're not growing. It is draining your best energy from what I want you to do and from the fruit I have for you and your life."

It would seem like, you know, we go around going, "Oh, wow" -- it's like one of the compliments busy. Wow, here in America, "Oh, they're so, look at all they're doing."

Really? "She's got so much growth. He's got so much growth. They've got all kinds of leaves. They're a great vine, a great branch, right? Amazing Christian."

What if God is in this season here saying, "Let me cut all this stuff back. It's not evil stuff, but it's got to be cut back because you're not bearing fruit. You're putting all your best into things that I not have you put your best into."

That's why we're calling the to pray. This isn't a week. This isn't day. This is a season of prayer that we believe we're in. It's a time and a space for God to prune us. Calling out to him, "Prune me. Cut off anything that takes away from bearing more fruit in my life."

We really truly believe that what could be ahead for us is not just fruit -- or not just a bunch of green leaves, it's more fruit, much fruit. This doesn't just go for us personally, this goes for the church. I mean, as a staff, we're praying because we look at this and go, "Lord, what are we doing?"

It's maybe not bad. It's good stuff, but are we really bearing fruit? Are we doing the things that are really going to bear fruit, or are we just doing a lot of things?

We have all these branches and all these leaves, but what are we doing? Like really, at the end of the day. We're trying to work through that. We're trying to pray through that, and we need your prayer. We really do.

Here's the thing, I want to make sure that I don't create this false sense of, "Oh, we're at this major crisis or major mountaintop thing."

This is discipleship, right? This is the normal Christian life. Things come at us, and we listen to Jesus and we slow down before we do something next. So if you're newer in your faith or younger in your faith, or maybe just younger in life, you're like, "Wow, this is so crazy and radical," it's going to be another step in the walk with Jesus.

This is a long walk in the same direction. What we're saying is this is a season, as we're walking, to say, "Slow down. Lord, would you prune me? Lord, would you cleanse me?"

We're calling the church to pray that. We're calling the church to pray for our country, "Lord, would you do this for our country," right?

"Please forgive us for what we see as sin in this country, the wickedness. Our leaders, Lord, bring revival into the halls of our government. Give them wisdom."

We're praying the third area, is just, "Holy Spirit, would you come and fill us?"

If you call Freshwater home, we're calling you to that. I don't know if you understand that. If Freshwater Church is your home, and you're not going to join in on this thing, why not? Like really, why not? We're calling everyone to pray this because we believe we're in this season. There's a lot of -- there's not a lot of stuff that we understand what to do next. This is so bizarre. But we know what we can do as we start walking this direction with Jesus, or moving forward, is prayer. We know what prayer can do.

What prayer can do is position us into a place where we are ready. This season right now of pruning, this season of cutting back, it is going to prepare us for a season that is coming of answered prayer of that. Much fruit. More fruit. That's what Christ wants. I know Christ would answer these prayers, and I know what's coming. I know what's coming. Christ will answer these prayers.

If we could look back in 100 years, and we see what Freshwater did during this season, and the answered prayers that came out of that, are you kidding me?

What's going to happen here in the weeks to come is the voices of culture are going to start talking again. Right now, they're all shut down. They're sheltering at home. Fantastic. But you

know what's going to start happening, you're going to start getting e-mails, "Join this. Start doing this."

You'll start hearing the voices of culture that you listened to, followed. Some of it probably isn't bad, but -- a lot of this isn't going to be bad. You and Jesus talk about it. But voices of culture will say, "Come back to the way it was. Come back to the way it was."

You know what John says, John, who was with Jesus in the moment, John, who wrote this, "I am the vine, you're the branches," you know what he said later in 1 John, the letter he wrote? He said, "This world doesn't know the voice of Jesus. It doesn't know Jesus."

If we aren't praying right now, if we aren't saying, "Prune me. Cleanse me," we are going to go right back to the way it is. I don't think -- I don't think Jesus would have us do that. I just don't think so.

Please join us. 30 minutes, one time a week. Pray for 30 minutes for us, for these three things. We're sending them out.

God to prune us and cleanse us. For our country, that God would forgive our country and begin to heal our country. For our church and everyone here, that God would fill us with the Spirit. I just firmly believe that the best thing that we can do right now is pray. It's to ask God to do these things.

I'm reading -- I referenced this, I'm trying to read through the Bible, and I came across this Proverb. Says it multiple times. It's this whole idea of people returning to their vomit. Dog returns to his vomit. People who struggle with addictions, whatever it could be, return to their vomit. What is that inside of us? I think God is over here saying, "If you would let me prune you and cut these things out, you would find that I can give you life. And you'll find that you will bear fruit."

So what are you going to do next? Not what are you going to do now in response?

What are you going to do next, as you look forward? Now is the time to begin to say, "Prune me. Clean me so I can bear fruit for you."

I want to close with a benediction. I invite you to -- I don't know what it looks like for you to receive this benediction. Just want to bless you here at the end of this time.

And before I do that, I want you maybe to just share around your table, whether it's with friends or your family, like a shelter at home, I don't know how you do that, around your Zoom table, I don't know what you're doing. I want to come back to that question we posed on Facebook, "What are five things you could do without?"

Phrase it this way, what do you think Christ is pruning out of your life and wants to prune out, or what are the things -- basically like that. What do you know Christ or hear Christ saying needs to go? Have the courage to share it. Don't just -- don't blow it off. Don't blow it off.

I just -- I have this vision. I have this vision of this church. It's a church -- it's our vision -- where the presence of God is flowing in us and flowing out of us, to bring this supernatural transformation to this world. That's the vision. And I think he wants to do it in greater ways than he ever has. Just receive this benediction.

Now to him who is able to do far more than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

[See Ephesians 3:20-21]