

SERMON: "Welcome Back: *Fruitful Living*"."

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, October 10, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

[Glad that you are here/choose to join your voice/prayers/presence with ours this morning:picked a good Sunday – Thanksgiving Sunday – the day we celebrate God's bounty/blessings! Fall – always special! It's changing seasons/colours/harvest/traditions: There's truly no better place/time of year to be reminded of the blessings that we have in/through God's grace! Glad that you're here to do what every Church/'family' should do:give thanks to God and with God our faithfulness/gratitude by living fruitfully.]

Just as we've heard that "Church" is not a place we go to/but is something we're called to 'be' – and being thankful – thanksgiving/giving thanks/counting our blessings is not just something we do in here/today/once a year! It's meant to be an everyday/everyway/living thing:in fact, it's actually a 'faith thing.' Don't believe me?/Check the Bible: the People of God have been giving thanks to/for God's bounty since Eden! Harvest themes/found 68 times throughout the Bible/references to reaping/harvesting are linked to our covenant relationship with God in which God provides for all our needs and we return to God our faithfulness/gratitude.(Deuteronomy reading) But these references are not just about wheat/pumpkins: they shift to being about the work that God is continually doing within us as individuals/community. And this is where today's reading comes in.

*[VINE:English Major/numerous 'images'/references to vines in Bible:some literal/most metaphorical(John reading). Primary VINE reference:Psalm 80:8-9/Isaiah 5:1-7 – "Vine"=People of God who God brought out of Egypt/cleared/prepared the land/expected 'fruit' – good grapes. Essential metaphor:relationship we're to have with God! God has provided for our every need/not just to survive/**but to be fruitful**:we are to produce good fruit/live fruitfully- honour God/do justice....]*

Time and time again the vine depicts the right relationships of what it means to be a faithful community: fruitful vines are faithful to God's laws/sustained/nourished/connected to God, whereas unfaithful communities are depicted as useless weeds/short lived grasses/withered, barren branches cut off from/then by, God and cast into the fire. But for us/you/me/Christians the 'vine' metaphor is one of the two living metaphors for the Church – other:"Body of Christ" – as Jesus/Himself uses it to describe the nature of our relationship with Him. Just as with the Body metaphor, the 'vine'/'vineyard' represent the whole/wholesome community of faith/the divine wish for the creation:that we are to be rooted/live in God's laws/and be fruitful. 'Vines' stand for living – for life/wellbeing/healing/and the providing/producing fruit.

[Also a metaphor for connection/unity. John reading:Jesus describes Himself/our relationship to Him/God: "I am the vine, my Father is the vine grower, and you are the branches." We're inexorably connected to Jesus: we/branches, growing out of/from Jesus/vine. By this organic/spiritual connection we/'leaves'/individuals and 'branches'/communities are united to/in Christ to support/love one another/bear fruit/live fruitfully.]

And it is this organic/intimate/connected relationship that Jesus speaks of when He describes how we are to "abide" in Him and He will "abide" in us. The Good News is that "abiding" in Jesus suggests a total interconnection, or communion between us/Him: but it's not a unilateral exchange – we have to work at the relationship! When Jesus calls us to live with/dwell – make our home

in/love/draw our comfort/courage/nourishment/inspiration in/from Him – He’s inviting us into an active/not passive exchange:there are conditions. Just as a branch, when it’s cut off from the vine, loses their only source of nourishment, that flows up/into them through the vine;we receive life from Christ. Similarly, having received life from the vine, we are to live up to our created potential by producing/*bear[ing] much fruit.*” But – friends – unlike our seasonal harvest that we celebrate today, our spiritual harvest is meant to be ongoing:we’re not to just produce when we feel like it; we’re to be abundant spending our days in fruitful living.

Clearly fruitful living is a blessing – but it is also a commission. From our John reading our new lives “*abiding*” in Christ (as Christians) will be marked/judged by a different standard/not earthly standards: having received mercy/grace/salvation through Christ we are born anew; our old life is gone replaced by a “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17)/second chance to live our lives differently – in gratitude. But if the driving commandment in this passage is to “*abide in*” Jesus/God or face the consequences;how do we do this? Well there are several ways but for today/Thanksgiving Sunday/beyond, the most important way to begin a life of fruitful living can be found in the Deuteronomy reading: we can start by being thankful – by being humble/giving back to God our gratitude for all that He has provided to us/our families; by giving thanks for the blessings we enjoy not just today/or this weekend. I pray that you have a Happy Thanksgiving – but also, that every day/in all that you do/say you live your life giving thanks to God in/through your fruitful living. Amen.