

SERMON: Abide in the Vine
TEXT: John 15:1-8

5-2-21

Who wants to be a millionaire?! I'm sure you've heard of this game show that started about twenty years ago. Originally hosted by Regis Philbin, it was quite popular in the first few years. Believe it or not, it's still going today. I was never a fan of the show, but I watched bits and pieces of it here and there, just out of curiosity.

I remember that there were several big money games shows that began around the same time. And I remember being really sickened by it because often there was no intelligence or skill involved. It was only about – and all about – the money. There was even a show called *Greed*. So, there you have it, right in the title. And without apology. Everybody wants to be a millionaire.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not against having money. I wouldn't mind having more of it, and if someone offered me a million dollars, I probably wouldn't turn it down. But those games shows make me sick because they perpetuate the *false* assumption that to have money is to be happy, to have money is to be

successful, to have money is to have no worries. False, false, false. These are not the lessons the world needs.

Well then, what lesson do we need? What lesson do high school or college graduates need, who are getting ready to go out into the world in pursuit of their own goals? Usually we're telling them to "go for it." Follow your dreams. Go for the gusto. Grab the brass ring. Reach for the stars. Find your pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Here's one of my favorites: "Don't be afraid to go out on a limb – that's where the fruit is."

Again, don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with these words of encouragement. We could all use a vote of confidence more often in life. However, these messages all seem to focus on what graduates should try to get – or even grab – for themselves. The goals that we're pointing them toward are all goals of "getting." Get a degree, get a good job, make lots of money, get married, buy a big house, have a family, get a good vehicle. Get more stuff.

Well, in the gospel of John, Jesus gave us a different lesson, a different sort of encouragement. His was not about going out on a limb to get the fruit; Jesus taught that we should be about *bearing fruit*. “My Father is glorified by this,” he said, “that you **bear much fruit** and become my disciples.”

We consider ourselves disciples: people who strive to follow Jesus and obey God’s commandments. But what does it mean to be a person who *bears fruit*? Well, a fruit tree produces fruit. And that fruit is for feeding and nourishing everything from worms and insects to squirrels and birds to humans. The tree does not produce the fruit for its own nourishment. In fact, the tree gains nothing from keeping all the fruit to itself. The very purpose of the tree is to produce fruit for the benefit of others.

Of course, the tree first needs to be rooted in soil where it will receive the water and nutrients it needs to grow. It needs to stay connected to its source. Then it can branch out (pun intended!). And the branches need to stay connected to the vine to get the nutrients they need to bud and flower and produce fruit.

“I am the true vine,” Jesus said. “And my Father is the vine grower.... 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.”

I love that word, *abide*. It feels so warm and inviting. Like when you visit someone's house and they say, “Make yourself at home.” It feels relaxing and comfortable. When I ABIDE IN THE VINE that is Jesus, all my needs are taken care of, all my worries fade away. It makes me want to curl up and take a nap.

I think all of that is true about abiding in Jesus. But there's more. Because I know that Jesus doesn't belong to me. God didn't send him to live and die and be raised for me alone. God didn't send Jesus so I could be comfortable and carefree. I - and everyone else who calls Jesus Lord and Savior - am expected to bear fruit. We become disciples not just to get something. It's not about getting. It's about giving.

Our purpose is **not** to become a millionaire, or to have the biggest house, or to hoard as much *fruit* as we can. Our God-given purpose is to produce fruit so that others may have what they need. Consider the following story.

On the East side of New York City there was a little old man named Jacob with a gray, scraggly beard, who dealt in coal and ice. He had his place of business in a dark basement underneath a huge apartment building. In winter he sold coal and in the summer he sold ice. He would sell coal by the bucket-load and would carry these buckets up three and four flights of stairs. In the summer, he would buy large cakes of ice, cut them into smaller cakes, and carry them up five, six flights of stairs to his customers. He was always bent under a load, so the local children called him “Jacob the Humpback.”

After the old man died, one of these children who belittled him learned that he raised two sons. Because of Jacob’s labors, one son became a professor at a large university and the other became a surgeon.

Was Jacob successful? By our standards, he certainly didn't achieve much for himself. His lifestyle wasn't what most people think of as the American dream. But did he bear fruit? Absolutely. He wasn't a millionaire by any stretch of the imagination, but he used his abilities to keep people warm in the winter and cool in the summer. And he produced enough fruit that his sons were able to get good educations and embark on careers that allowed them to serve others.

I recently heard the most beautiful idea from a mother who is raising two young children. She talked about how every trip to the store was filled with cries of "I want this" and "I want that." Everyone who has dealt with young children is familiar with the sound. And the aggravation.

Well, one day this young mother decided to try something different. Before they got to the store, she told her children that each of them could choose one can of food to give to the food pantry at their church. They were so excited. After each one chose a can, they held onto it until they arrived at the checkout line. And - as the story goes - never asked for anything for themselves. They had been given an important responsibility and a purpose. And they stopped whining about things they wanted for themselves.

Our purpose is to bear fruit; our focus is to be on Christ: to abide in Christ, to live with Christ, to stay close to Christ. Jesus said, “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.”

We come to the Lord’s table to be fed and nourished and have our thirst quenched. To be refreshed. To be strengthened. To be invigorated. So that we can go out and feed others.

May we do it to the glory of God!

AMEN.