

Last Sunday we had the amazing volunteer team of coordinators along with our pastors out at booths across the foyer. We are all so thankful to those who signed up to get connected. It is a process to get everyone called, contacted, background checked and placed on the schedule so we appreciate your patience as we work to do just that. There are still places and ways for you to get connected so if you weren't here last week or if over the course of this week God has spoken to your heart about a ministry you'll find several sign up sheets at the Information Desk. You'll also find more Carbondale Connect booklets and Carbondale Connect bracelets. Feel free to grab a bracelet and if you haven't read through the booklet to find a place to serve I encourage you to do that. Maybe God has been speaking to you this week about children's ministry – VBS might be a great way to test that out! You can work in the Ark Park or with the elementary aged students. There are lots of ways to get connected and we're so grateful to those who are connected, who got connected last week, and those who are still considering.

We are finishing our Carbondale Connect series today. Over the last few weeks we've talked about our spiritual DNA at Carbondale, and how we function, together, as the body of Christ. Each of us play a vital and important, but oftentimes different role within the body – some are feet, some are hands, some are eyes – but when we work together – that's called coordination – we are able to do amazing things. We have established that we must not get territorial or jealous or judgmental – what do you mean you can't see that? Well, it's because I'm an ear. Instead we should be productive, effective, and stay connected. But, how do we stay connected? That is the question I want to spend time answering this morning.

If you have your Bible you can turn to John 15 because we're going to hang out there all morning. Jesus reveals Himself and His identity using several metaphors in John's gospel. All of his metaphors would have had significant meaning to the people of Israel. For instance in John 6 Jesus announces I am the bread of life. The crowd would have collectively gasped, "What?" because bread had come to symbolize "the wisdom or life sustaining presence of God" and Jesus had just declared He was the embodiment of God's presence, which would fully sustain them. We read that and say, "Cool. I love bread!" So you can see how these

metaphors are even more important in context. John records Jesus saying I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the gate, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and I am the true vine. Bread, gates – you’ll remember from the giant picture we’ve put up on Palm Sunday, sheep, vineyards – these were things the people were intimately acquainted with and fully understood. If Jesus were here in Oklahoma today it’s quite likely that His stories would feature oil, cattle, football, and tornadoes because it’s what makes the most sense to us. The people of Jesus day not only understood these images, but they also got that Jesus was changing and transforming all their symbols. The vineyard for example was depicted on coins, on paintings, even at the temple. Grapes and vines were huge symbols of the land God had given His people and that type of imagery features heavily in the books of the Old Testament prophets. God tended that vine in the OT to make sure that the people remained in His vineyard, but in John 15 Jesus is about to change that. He’s about to declare that being connected to Israel and the land is no longer what matters as much as being connected to the true vine – Jesus.

Here’s what He says starting in verse 1:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:1-8

The NIV translates the word as remain, but many of us remember it from the KJV as abide. Abide in me and I in you. Abide is probably the better translation, but since so many of us use the NIV we're gonna roll with that for the most part – plus it works better with the series – remain connected! I'll use the words interchangeably throughout the sermon. The English definition of abide says continue without fading or being lost. That's the piece we're focusing on. How do we stay connected, remain, abide, not fade in our connection or let the connection get lost? What does it mean to be connected to the vine – to Jesus?

Remember that when the Jews, including Jesus own disciples, heard Him say this they were shocked! They thought they understood the vineyard imagery. But what they just heard Him say was Apart from Jesus we can do nothing? But, we've done everything as a result of our connection to Israel. You're saying we have to remain in you as you have remained in relationship with Your Father? This changed everything.

We may have been getting the impression this month that as long as we're connected to Carbondale we're okay. You identified with the spiritual dna of Carbondale because it's yours as well. You were here during the Pieratt years of evangelism or pick any other era - and you've stuck it out. I've been a member of Carbondale for 65 years, been connected to that church forever – and that's great and I hope to have the same thing said about me at my funeral, but the real question is were you connected to Jesus? We can do all the outreach to our community and visit the sick and pack up groceries all day long, but if the branch called Carbondale isn't connected to the vine it doesn't matter and if you or me, Sarah Taylor, isn't connected to the vine, to Jesus, then nothing I did personally mattered either. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. This series has been about connecting to the church and finding a place of service at Carbondale, but it's been built on the premise that we're already connected to Jesus. But I just want to make it abundantly clear – being connected to this church is a wonderful thing and I want you to call Carbondale home and love this place as much as I do, but the connection that matters for eternity is being connected to Jesus.

In order to stay connected we have to abide, remain in the vine. Here's the first answer to the question I've been asking. First, **Remaining connected means taking time** It implies that we'll need to sit down and stay a while in our times with the Lord. You can't hurry and remain at the same time. To hurry means you're done - you've left. In Oklahoma we remain at the dinner table long enough to see if there's dessert coming, but in other places around the world dinner is a looong event with more courses than just the dinner and dessert. You remain seated at the table for a while to eat course after course. In eastern European countries the meal almost always starts with soup. I don't like soup - broth based soup is just wet food - chicken - good, noodles - good - why are they floating? Now, you add some heavy cream and we'll talk. But, you can't hurry through the piping hot soup, and even if you did hurry it won't bring out the next course any earlier. A good meal takes time to enjoy in places where relationship and conversation are valued above time.

Remaining in the vine means we'll have to slow down and abide with Jesus - spend time at His table and in His presence, be quiet for a while - turn off the tv, turn off even the worship music from time to time and just sit quietly before the Lord - abide in His presence and listen. God is always speaking, but I'm not often listening. For most of us sitting still in God's presence just listening feels like laziness. You mean you want me to carve out time in a busy week to just sit and be quiet? But, in every other relationship you have taking time to listen and hear them out is considered a really good communication skill. We should practice listening to and abiding with Jesus. Connect with God by carving out time to spend with Him.

Remaining connected means knowing His Word. Verse 7 tells us If you remain in me and my words remain in you... His words cannot remain in us if we do not know His words to begin with. Regular reading of God's word is vital to our spiritual health as it is what keeps us connected to the vine. The vine is the source of life and we will wither and die when we stop getting its nourishment. I am not outdoorsy, as you well know, and gardening causes me to lose my mind. For me there are 4 categories of plants - trees, shrubs, flowers, weeds. I'm not great at describing them in any more detail. I can identify roses and tulips. But, flowers are really pretty, but when you cut them and put them in a vase and set them in your house they'll look

beautiful for a short while, but they won't last because even that plant food is no match for remaining connected to the plant or vine or whatever. You might get by on your favorite verse that grandma cross-stitched on a pillow for a short while, but to flourish and grow you'll need to remain connected by knowing His word.

There are all sorts of Bible reading programs and apps to be found. If you find it difficult to just open the Bible and read then find an app that will help you. The YouVersion app on your phone – the middle icon says Plans – that's a great place to start. It'll ease you in to carving out space to remain connected to Jesus and to His word. Or work up to reading the full chapter that the verse of the day is found in. There are lots of ways to begin or start again connecting to Jesus through the Word. A common reason why people don't read the word for themselves is they say it doesn't make sense – can I encourage you to be in a Sunday School class then? Studying the book of Hebrews or the parables this summer in a SS class will not only cause that book or those stories to come to life but will help give you tools for studying other books or passages on your own in a similar fashion. But, in order to remain connected to the vine you'll need to do something beyond attending church. If Hear the Word of the Lord on Sunday morning is the only time you're hearing or reading a chapter of the Bible then you will discover that your connection to Jesus is fading. Abide, spend time, remain connected to Jesus through His word. Let it challenge you, encourage you, transform you.

Remaining connected means praying. Again looking at verse 7, it reads, **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.” John 15:7** This isn't a recipe for how to get all your prayers answered in 3 easy steps, but it is an indication of how to not get your prayers answered. If we fail to remain connected to the vine then it makes sense that our prayers will not be effective. Prayer is important for abiding and remaining in the vine. Daily conversations with Jesus happen in those times of abiding, and as a result we can be confident that our prayers are in accordance to His will and purpose. Prayer for ourselves and prayer for others happens when we are connected to the vine. When we're connected to the vine it's the power and presence of Jesus that flows into us as branches. We can pray with power because we're connected to

Jesus. We can expect Jesus to show up when we're connected. We can believe that healing flows and help comes and change occurs when we pray as a result of our connection to the true vine, Jesus. Stay connected by cultivating a life of prayer.

Remaining connected means we will bear fruit. Verse 8, **"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."** **John 15:8** Love and obedience are two fruits we produce when we're connected to the vine. Here's how the rest of the passage in John 15 reads:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other." John 15:9-17

When we remain connected to the vine it means we produce fruit that will last. That fruit looks like obeying Jesus commands which He received from the Father and it looks like loving others. This type of fruit is how we show that we are disciples.

Disciples of Jesus remain connected to the vine and they bear fruit. Period. There is no, well, I show my discipleship by attendance or tithing or sharing facebook posts. Nope. Discipleship looks like abiding and producing. Our times of abiding – spending time with Jesus, reading and studying His word, praying are to produce fruit through obeying commands to love and serve and help others. The nature of Jesus – to serve and not to be served, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to lay down our life for our friends flows through us because of our connectedness to the vine. Obedience to God's word and love for others becomes a natural outflow. How do we remain connected to Jesus and to His love? By producing fruit.

What kind of fruit are we producing – how connected we are to the vine will answer that question. We produce good fruit when we're connected to the source, but we shrivel and die and are unable to produce anything at all when we lose connection. "Productive lives of eternal significance," is how a professor at AGTS described it. What is your connection to Jesus producing that will last? Because something lasting and eternal should come from our time spent in connection with Jesus.

Finally, **Remaining connected means we will love others.** It brings us full circle to all the things we've been saying this month. If we're connected to Jesus we'll love all the people – old people, young people, little kids, sticky kids, rich people, poor people, smart people, not so smart people, people of all colors, creeds, religions, legal people, illegal people, people in need, people who have material needs met, people we like and people we don't like. Just people or as Jesus once called them – neighbors. When we're connected to the vine the love that Jesus has for all the people flows into us causing us by extension to love others. Old people loving young people and young people loving old people and white people loving black and brown people and all the people standing in the 4th Sunday food share line loving each other. We don't have to work something up to find love for our neighbor inside of us – when we're connected to Jesus that love is just there – it just flows through us and out of us onto others. That's what being connected to His love looks like.

Verse 9 – **"Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:9-10** Obeying His commands includes loving others. There are lots of ways to do that and connecting at Carbondale is just one way, but within that we have a host of opportunities for you to connect here and love others. You can work with kids in the Ark Park or upstairs in our C.Kids ministries on Wednesday nights or Sundays, or with students with Pastor Jeff. There are opportunities to visit shut-ins or those in the hospital or those in a nursing home. You can lead or host a Life Group or serve young families at our monthly Talking is Teaching program. We have ways you can work behind the scenes writing cards or bagging groceries or

making a meal. Connection and loving others happens in serving meals and those in need. Opportunities are there to be in the schools and impact our community.

Teaching, singing, playing an instrument, working in the media department – it's all a way to stay connected by using your skills and abilities for the Lord.

What I'm trying to say is when we're connected to the vine – spending time, knowing His word, and praying then the natural outflow is to produce fruit and love others. This is what matters – loving God, loving others. He pours His love into us as we abide and remain in Him and then we remain in that love by extending it to others.

Abiding isn't easy or fast, but it leads to complete joy. Learning to take time each day to be with Jesus – even if it's just 5 minutes here and there to begin with – but it's dedicated minutes – will help you stay connected to Jesus. Listen for His voice – He's speaking, read His word – He has something to say to you through His written Word as well, Pray – He wants to hear from you too and then produce fruit that will last and remain connected to His love which should cause you to love each other. It is my personal opinion that staying connected to a church family will help you to live this out – being in church will encourage you to stay connected to Jesus, it will help you to produce fruit, and it gives you opportunities to love others. This is a great church – not perfect – but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world. Get connected here and then remain connected by abiding in Jesus.

If you're here today and are realizing you're not yet connected to Jesus. The vine is on the other side of the backyard from where you're at, but you'd like to get connected to Jesus and start a new life in Him. I have good news for you. Just as Jesus is the true vine He is also the way to God the Father, He was sent to live among us as a sinless man. God had set the penalty for sin at death – someone must die to satisfy the price. Jesus, in the chapter we've been looking at said, **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13** That is exactly what He did for me and for you. Out of His great love He gave His life so that we could be free from sin. On this Memorial Day weekend as we honor those who laid down their lives for others how fitting it would be for you to honor Jesus' sacrifice by inviting Him to come into your life and pour out His grace and mercy

and forgiveness over your sin. Jesus is present to save and change you completely and get you connected to the source of real, empowering, transforming, eternal life. Let's get connected and let's stay connected to Jesus by remaining in Him, in His words, in prayer, and by producing fruit and remaining in His love.
Let's pray.