

Thank you all for your prayers last week, and for reading this Talk now.

TEDDY TALK WITH MARTIN UMC FRIENDS AND FAMILY

The 2023 PEACE ON EARTH Series

Peace on Earth Being one with the Christ through Pruning

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.

John 15:1-2

The quasi-farm boy from Kingsmill Texas came out in me when I decided to write a four-part bearing fruit series using Jesus' words in John 15. There are many examples from the farm that are spread throughout Jesus' New Testament words. He is noted for associating farming requirements for people to mature in their lifelong attempt to act and speak like Him. I'll begin with branches that bear fruit and require pruning to create more fruit.

One of the Kingsmill lessons I learned was that vines left to themselves will sprawl out all over the place and produce huge canopies of leaves...minus produce. From my own childhood experience and lessons from my gardener mother, I know that canopies not controlled cause the vine to fail to yield much fruit. Jesus teaches that cutting off non fruit bearing branches and pruning others will increase production. He compares the vines to us and people we can influence as a modern-day disciple of Jesus the Christ.

Pruning is a counter-intuitive activity because multiple leaves suggests that what we have is a very healthy vine. In fact, it may be all show and no results. Jesus is afraid that the disciples might face this same problem. He wasn't interested in flashy followers any more than he is interested in flashy churches and dramatic disciples today. What he is interested in is fruit.

Every father in Kingsmill knew the rules of farming and each of them were quick to give advice to six kids all born in the same year. That is only interesting when you know there were only nine families with homes in the agricultural town. I like to refer to me and five others as Children of the Wheat. All six of us were separated eight to thirteen years from our youngest older sibling. We were four new boy and two new girl children born within seven months of each other. My mother turned forty the year I was born, and all our parents were over thirty-five at our birth.

We respected each father who worked so hard to educate us on growing crops. We learned that pruning came in a variety of methods. For example, Mr. Rasco, one of the half dozen fathers, explained to us the importance of removing suckers on plants. A sucker is a branch that usually grows in the fork of the main trunk and a fruit-producing branch. According to our teacher, the new branch will not produce fruit. It will only sap the resources from the fruit-producing branch. So, to have a better crop, I was instructed to remove the suckers. It is important to remove the obstacles that keep us from sharing our faith to others.

My second association with pruning comes from Walt Disney World. WDW was opened October 1, 1971, and I was in the opening parade with nine other Navy Sailors from the Naval

Training Center. We marched in Dress Blues pushing the huge drums filled with the balloons which we released at specific times during the parade. My memory from that trip to Disney World is vivid. I never thought about creating hedge-type plants growing in amazing shapes. Disney had one that looked just like Mickey Mouse and another like Donald Duck. I learned that by trimming the bushes regularly, they were able to shape the plants to look like Disney stars. To say the least, I was beyond impressed.

In a similar fashion, I believe God prunes our lives to shape us into the image of Jesus Christ. Sometimes the pruning involves removing sin from our lives. And sometimes God's pruning is painful, but over time God is changing us to look, act, and sound more like Jesus.

There is one important thing we need to notice about this pruning. You can look at a hundred vines and you will never see one branch pruning another branch. It seems to me that the job of pruning, shaping and otherwise trimming those vines must be the job of someone besides the branches themselves. That responsibility is left to God. We are amateurs but necessary change agents. It is likely we don't do the job right, so as willing servants for God, we follow his lead for bring others into our Church, our faith, and our Churchwide family ties.

So, it is good news that Jesus is the True Vine, God is the vinedresser, and we are branches who are intent on sharing our faith as United Methodists.

*Peace Always,
Ted*