



**Sermon:** June 20, 2021

**Scripture Reading:** John 15: 1-8

**The Message:**

Under the Knife in the Garden of Love

[Video Version](#)



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First, there is connection.

I was in cardiology a few years ago, waiting for a test. I overheard a woman answering questions before an echocardiogram:

Have you had or been exposed to the flu in the past 30 days? “No, I don’t go anywhere where I would be exposed to the flu.”

Who can we inform in case of emergency? “No one. I have no family, and you can’t manufacture friends. I just lie at home, waiting to die.”

I wanted to step up and say, you can contact me!

At the next meeting of the weekly Bible study I have attended for over thirty years with colleagues, I told this story – and I said, you know, if she had a church, she would have had someone to put down. I don’t think anyone who belongs to Maple Grove could say they have no one.

I hope that is true of Christ First as well. Because our member Eugene told his accountant he attended Christ First, he didn’t die alone on his bedroom floor.

Surprisingly, no other minister in my group thought that their church would be the emergency contact for any of their members.

No one who belongs to us should ever have to say, I have no family; I have no friends.

For we are the church, and the church is connected to Christ like branches are connected to the vine.

So first, there is connection. But That connection is not without pain.

On Fathers’ Day or Mothers’ Day, there is a temptation for ministers to become sentimental about family life. Unless you are actually in a normal family! Families are messy, sometimes frustrating.

Jesus raises up the connectedness of the vine and the branches – it’s a good one for Christian families too. It’s not always comfortable, sentimental. There is pruning.

It’s pruning season for some of my spring blooming bushes.

I used to be quite nervous about pruning, until I attended Howard Stenison’s pruning lecture. Howard Stenison inherited Sheridan Nurseries from his father, who inherited it from the Grubs, early landscapers of note who designed University Avenue and the Niagara Parkway.

Howard’s pruning lecture was memorable.

This week we hear Jesus giving HIS pruning lecture.

What did we learn from Howard, and what do we learn from Jesus?

Howard talked about pruning roses; Jesus talks about pruning grape vines.

Many roses and grapes have one set of roots and the branches are grafted on to the root.

In this passage from John, Jesus is the vine, the people are the branches. It's as if God has given the people a support system, Jesus Christ, so the branches have a better chance to stay connected and produce fruit. Jesus tells us that when he looks at a grape vine, he sees himself as the root and his followers as the branches. God is the expert gardener.

Howard taught us two kinds of pruning.

The first:

Sometimes you have to cut whole branches out, right down to the root.

Jesus tells us about two kinds of pruning.

The first:

Sometimes God has to cut whole branches out from the root, because they don't bear fruit.

And these branches are those people who think they can do just what they want in life to fulfill their own lives. People who continue to sin, make bad choices, and generally drain the strength from others.

The second kind of pruning Howard taught us:

You have to cut the good branches to get them to produce more flowers.

The second kind of pruning Jesus teaches us:

You have to cut the good branches to get them to produce more grapes.

God does that kind of pruning too. We grow strong and produce more as we take strength from the root; as long as we do get our strength from the root, we can turn those difficult times when it feels like we are being pruned into times of learning and rededicating ourselves to produce more fruit for Christ.

Most people giving lectures about pruning would have a lot of technical detail to tell us, but Howard learned to prune when he was 8 years old. He and his brothers had to prune hundreds of trees for Sheridan Nurseries. So his advice comes from many years of experience. He told us things like, "Some say you have to cut above a bud; WHEREVER you cut will be above a bud!"

AND

"Some say you have to cut the branches in the middle so the air will flow through; the air is going to flow through anyway!"

His lecture made me feel very brave about pruning.

God is going to be brave too. Sometimes that doesn't feel very good.

We don't expect to be pruned – we do all we can to avoid suffering but sometimes we put ourselves in the way of pain to help another – and perhaps it is then that we learn most how to bear fruit for Christ.

God has chosen to be in partnership with us, to bear fruit with us.

What is this fruit?

the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22, 23)

Sometimes, if we are brave our prayer might be, dear God, prune us; we want to bear more fruit.

Just a little at a time though, and don't let it hurt too much please.