

## **'Remaining in Christ'**

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*Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ*

*The Lord has told you mortals what is good, and what it is that the Lord requires of you: only to act justly, to love loyalty, to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6,8*

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### Collect:

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another and walk in the way of his commandments, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

### Loving Creator

1 Loving Creator,  
grant to your children  
mercy and blessing,  
songs never ceasing,  
grace to invite us,  
peace to unite us -  
Loving Creator,  
Parent and God.

2 Jesus Redeemer,  
help us remember  
your pain and passion,  
your resurrection,  
your call to follow,  
your love tomorrow -  
Jesus Redeemer,  
our Friend and Lord.

3 Spirit descending,  
your light unending  
brings hope and healing,  
is truth revealing.  
Dispel our blindness,  
inspire our kindness -  
Spirit descending,  
Spirit adored.

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles (1908-1970)

### **Jn.15,1-8**

Dear friends

As old as Christianity itself is the question of what *authentic* Christian faith is and looks like. From the beginning it was challenged by the possibility of the inauthentic. This challenge is one that the church is permanently faced with. To be unaware of this is a mark more likely of the inauthentic than of the authentic.

Jesus here lays out to his disciples the ways and nature of authentic faith. And what he says is meant to be understood both as a guidance and as binding for the church, for its work and its witness. There may not be for the church a task more urgent and necessary than to reflect on these words of Jesus and to apply itself to the instruction found in them. The word “if”, used repeatedly in this passage, signals that there are certain conditions on which an authentic faith depends – conditions which if not met, or if departed from, result in a faith that is of no use or worse a hindrance.

Now the nature of authentic Christian faith is circumscribed here in Jesus’s words to his disciples: *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* The main thought here is that of ‘bearing fruit’. That is, it is the output of the life of the believer *in as far as it is Christ-like* (!) which gives away the presence or otherwise of authentic faith. *“By their fruit you shall know them”*, said Jesus. And here the question must be: how does such fruit come about?

This question, as it ought to, leads us to Jesus’ use of the simile of the ‘vine and the branches’, referring to himself and his disciples. In this simile the disciples are spoken of as ‘branches’ and taught to understand themselves by way of this image: *“You are the branches”*.

The branches are the fruit-bearing part of the plant, and the term is therefore very fittingly applied to the disciples. But the crucial thing is this that the fruit-bearing quality or strength of the branches depends on two factors other than themselves. The branches, which are the disciples/the church, are, as it were, “sandwiched” between one thing to their left and one thing to their right without which they produce little, or the wrong kind of fruit, or nothing at all. To the left of what is to bear fruit is the vine, to the right of it the gardener.

The illustration is cleverly chosen because it shows with immediate clarity that authentic faith, the fruit-bearing kind, is not something that proceeds from or stands in ourselves. Prior to the branches there is the vine; there is he who says *“I am the vine”*, that is, Jesus Christ. He is first and pre-eminent; there is no beginning but in him; he is the source. Before the words *“You are the branches”*, there are the words *“I am the vine”*, that is, the word that says what Christ is for us: We

can only be those who can do nothing in terms of his command to love one another as he loved us until he mediates to us the fruit of his cross and resurrection – the will of God (gardener!) by the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The connection runs from the vine to the branches, so that any dis-connect must show in a lack of fruit on the branches.

Dear friends, what does this illustration express but our need to order our lives fully towards Christ? To let him be the strength of a fruitful life? To avail ourselves of what he is and what he has done for us? Without this living connection to Jesus Christ, union with him, there can be no Christian faith, no authentic faith. There may be something that has the name, indeed has even the appearance of it, but not something fruit-bearing – *“apart from me you can do nothing”*, says Jesus.

Like a gardener tends to the vine by pruning the branches so that more fruit be produced, so God tends to the believers’ union with Christ, providing means and ways by which this purpose is achieved. First, God calls and by this call moves a person to become a believer and by putting her trust in Jesus to join herself to him. *“No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them”*, says Jesus (Jn.6,65). Then, second, God calls forth opportunities by one’s response to events and circumstances to deepen faith and grow in one’s union with Christ which otherwise would pale and grow dim and become fruitless. This is according to what Jesus said: *“Consider carefully what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”* (Mk.4,24.25)

Dear friends, Jesus above all, in bringing home the point, emphasises the need for the believer/church to remain in him – that is the root and source of authentic faith -, not to let the branch be severed from this vine. If we remain in him, and only if we do, he comes to be in us and we are not *“apart from him”*, therefore the union will not remain fruitless. Just how much Jesus wants us to know that his saving presence is given with what he calls *‘remaining in me’*, is made clear by his words: *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* These words also give us the answer to the question of *how* we remain in him – by letting his word remain in us and by asking in accordance with it: By using the Scriptures to make Christ known to us and by seeking in prayer the power of Christ’s death and resurrection to be made fruitful in our lives, to the glory of God.

AMEN

I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art, my only Trust and Saviour of my heart, who pain didst undergo for my poor sake; I pray thee from our hearts all cares to take. / Thou are the King of mercy and of grace, reigning omnipotent in every place: so come, O King, and our whole being sway; shine on us with the light of thy pure day. / Thou art the life, by which alone we live, and all our substance and our strength receive; sustain us by thy faith and by thy power, and give us strength in every trying hour. / Thou hast the true and perfect gentleness, no harshness hast thou, and no bitterness: oh, grant to us the grace we find in thee, that we may dwell in perfect unity. / Our hope is in no other save in thee; our faith is built upon thy promise free; Lord, give us peace, and make us calm and sure, that in thy strength we evermore endure.

- time of prayer / intercession – [we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God’s Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here; we think of the situation in India, the suffering of the people there and elsewhere, and give thanks for the help that is being delivered; for unity in the determination to share our means with those who lack them; we pray for God’s blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name; ]

***‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who has shown us such love, and in his grace has given us such unfailing encouragement and so sure a hope, still encourage and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

**And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN**