

Message for September 13, 2020

Plastic fruit. I'm sure you've all seen it. Perhaps some of you have it in your home. It's a nice, attractive decoration. Apples, grapes, pears, bananas, etc. From a distance each one looks pretty real. Colorful and bright, they appear quite tasty and desirable. But appearances can be deceiving. There is a saying that things aren't always the way they seem to be. So as you get a lot closer, you can see that they are not real, lacking the texture of fruit, and with a somewhat waxy appearance. Quite disappointing to the hungry onlooker whose taste buds had been deceptively aroused.

So much in life is like that plastic fruit. We desire what we see, only to find that once we have it, it isn't quite what we thought it was, doesn't please us as we thought it would, and perhaps cost us a lot more than what we thought it was worth. Imitations are never as good as the real thing. Scripture contains many examples, but let's stick with fruit. There is good fruit (the real kind) and there is bad fruit (the imitation). The good fruit is characterized by the life it gives to the eater (the recipient). Good fruit is spiritually uplifting, encouraging and edifying, promotes unity, is self-giving, and above all else, glorifies God. The bad fruit may look similar at first in many respects, but eventually it manifests itself as self-serving rather than God-glorifying. It often results in disharmony and strife, and is lifeless. It does not nourish. Many works, even of Christians, have the appearance of being good fruit, and may be well intentioned. But when done according to one's own will, as opposed to being done in obedience to the will of God, these works do not bear His life-giving attributes and simply become poor imitations of true fruit. It is imperative that all fruit be born of God as a result of our abiding in the Vine (Jesus). He is the source of life, and the fruit we bear will not contain life unless we are a branch firmly affixed to the vine, drawing our sustenance from Him through obedience to His will.

But what enables us to abide in Him? Is it not love, the love of God? There are countless reasons why we love Him, but because we do it becomes our desire to please and obey Him. This desire is then expressed through love for others. This is the necessary ingredient to produce good fruit: genuine God-inspired love. Not the emotional attachment or lustful desire that the world defines as love. But rather the act following the decision to give of oneself to benefit another. This love in action produces good fruit. To quote Beth Moore in her booklet *Promises For a Fruitful Life*, "Without love, all fruit is plastic." Makes perfect sense to me. Think about it.

May all your fruit be planted, watered, fertilized, ripened, and harvested in love.

A bumper crop of blessings,
Pastor Joe

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." --- Proverbs 11:30

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. "
John 15:4-8

JOY SEEKERS

In northern Minnesota several years ago, some women formed a “joy circle.” They settled into a routine of meeting every couple of weeks to share joys they’ve noticed. Their aim, amid our troubled world and chaotic lives, is to deliberately focus on the positive. The women don’t simply hope to stumble upon good news among the outrage, bitterness and tragedy surrounding us; they actively seek out joy and report it to the group.

Joy is a fruit of the spirit named in Galatians 5:22-23. As Christians, we don’t ignore or dismiss life’s struggles and sorrows, and neither do joy-circle participants. But God promises that life is stronger than death, and Jesus’ resurrection is proof. With the Holy Spirit’s help, we can make a spiritual discipline of seeking and sharing joy — and thanking God for it. (Visit joycircles.network online to learn more.)

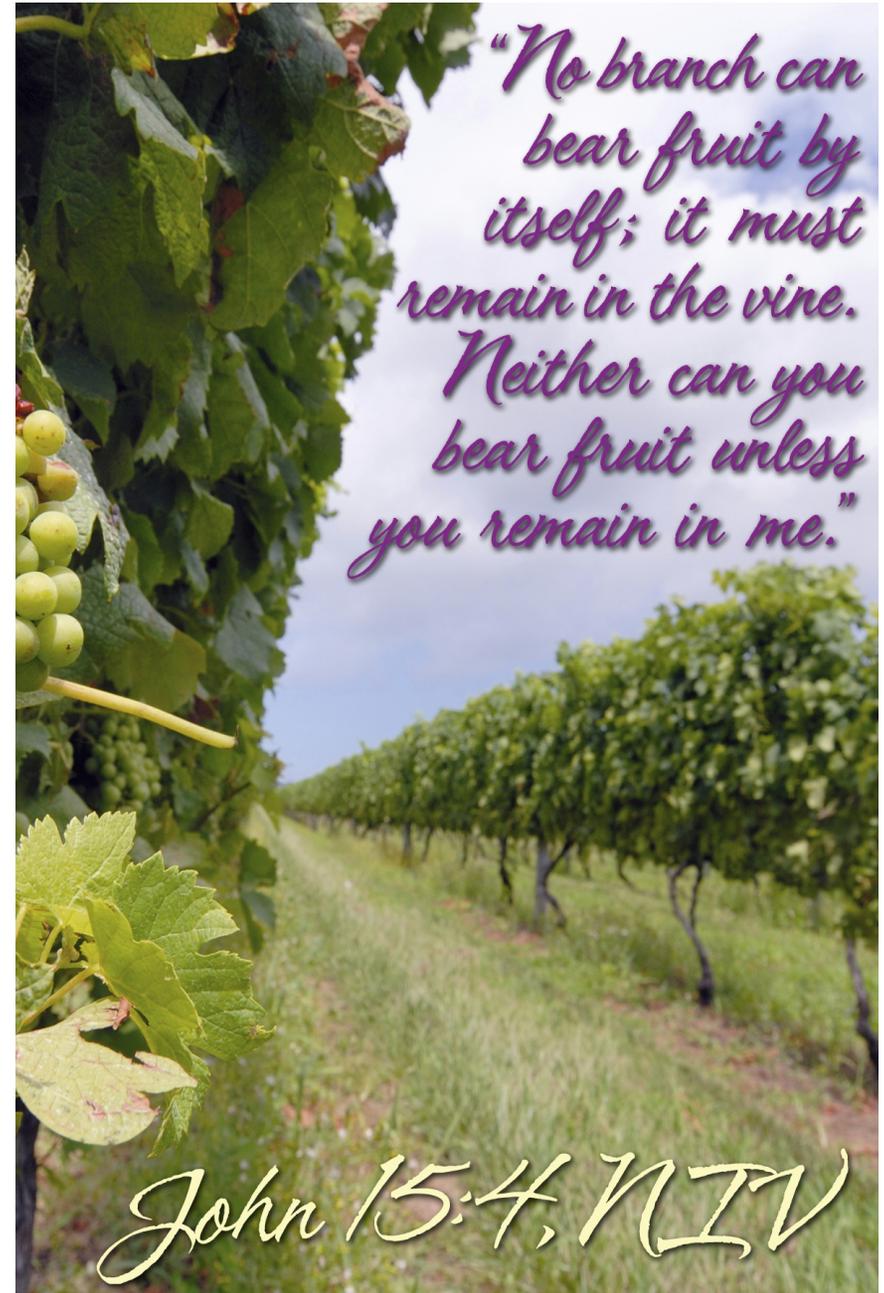
—Heidi Mann

SEEDS

The Bible often uses seeds as symbols of faith or God’s Word. In the Old Testament, seeds also refer to offspring. Jesus said people who believe in him can perform mighty deeds with “faith the size of a mustard seed” (Luke 17:6, NRSV). Many of Jesus’ teachings use seed imagery; for example, in the parable of the four soils, he said the seed, God’s Word, can grow only when people hear it, “*hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance*” (Luke 8:15, NRSV).

CONCERNING TREES ... AND US

Have deep roots,
branch out,
be flexible,
keep growing on the inside,
bloom often,
show your colors,
point your trunk upward,
raise your limbs to heaven,
and bring forth good fruit, as long as you live.



“The Little Church That Could”
“Believing is Seeing”