

Time for an Upgrade

April 29, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Bill Mann

My wife took her cell phone into the store a couple of weeks ago. She needed a new cover for the phone. The salesman, a former student from Broad Run High School, said, “Mrs. Mann, you’ve had this phone for five years. Five years! We don’t make covers for this phone anymore. What you need is an upgrade.” So she got an upgrade—a new cover and a new phone. Drive thru McDonalds. Order one of their “meal deals”. The person at the window will ask you—“Do you want an upgrade?”-- Do you want to super-size it--get a large fries and a super-sized drink. That’s an upgrade. My message to you this morning is this: What we need is an UPGRADE!

I want you to think back over the last year. Where have you been? Where have you come from? Where are you going? Because where you are right now is not a stopping point; it’s a stepping stone. Are you still dealing with the same old problems you were dealing with last year, the same old relationship woes, the same old toxic personalities?—if life just isn’t working for you right now, then, maybe what you need is an upgrade. Because, I believe, God wants to bring you to a better place. He has a plan. He know where you are. He know if you’re tired. He knows if you’re empty. He knows what you’ve been through. And so, it’s time to plead our case before the Lord. It’s time to come to him in prayer. It’s time to say, “Lord, I’m ready—I’m ready for an UPGRADE!” Are you ready for that? Because God wants to give you more of himself and his Word. So, turn to your neighbor—the person sitting next to you—

and give them a high-five—and tell them, “What you need is an UPGRADE!”

So, with that in mind, I want you to turn to our text, Jesus’ words in John 15:1-8—the Gospel for today. Jesus begins by saying, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” Right there, I have to tell you, I’ve got a problem. It’s with the words “every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.” A footnote down at the bottom of the page that says, “This is a reference to judgement.” If you don’t bear fruit you’re gonna get cut off. That sounds like judgement to me. But here’s the thing—the Greek word here is *airo*. And in the broad sense *airo* can mean “take away” and *airo* can mean “cut off.” But *airo* can also mean “lift up.” And any of you who have done any gardening, you know that vines need to be lifted up if they are going to bear fruit. Are you growing tomatoes?—don’t let those vines drag on the ground. Lift them up. Are you growing pole bean?—build teepees of poles so the vines have something to grow on. Lift them up. And everyone know that for grapes you have to build a trellis. If you let the grapes drag in the dust you are not going to get good fruit. They have to be lifted up.

Human beings don’t do well with dust either. It makes me sneeze. It can make you sick. And if there is enough of it, dust can literally kill you. That’s the curse of sin. Remember the Garden of Eden. God cursed Satan, and said, “You will crawl on your belly and eat the dust of the earth.” God doesn’t want his people to drag along in the dust. We need to be *airo*—lifted up. I had a phone call from one of our church members this past week. He said, “Pastor, I wanted to let you know my marriage is going so much better. Our counselor took me aside and said, ‘Why don’t you just try being nice? Instead of criticizing your partner and tearing them down,’ he said, ‘why not try lifting them up.’” He said, “It took 30 days, Pastor, but it’s changed my life. And my marriage has never been better.” Life gets pretty barren when we are constantly being dragged down into the dust. And it’s even worse when we drag

others down into the dust with us. We all need to be lifted up. And we need to lift one another up.

This is especially true in the church. The church is like a vine. The branches twirl around one another and support one another and together we reach up toward God. When the burdens of life try to drag us back down into the dust, we can support one another. This is one of the blessings of our Small Group Ministry and being part of the people of God. And Jesus is always, every day, giving us the strength we need to bear fruit. Take a look at our gospel—John 15:1-8. Count how many times the word “abide” is used. I count seven times. What does it mean?—to abide. It means that Jesus wants us to live connected to him—“I am the true vine,” Jesus says, “you are the branches.” When you live your life connected to Jesus, when he is the source of your strength—*airo*--he lifts you up. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, the Bible says—*airo*—he lifted her up. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead—*airo*—he lifted her up. When Jesus healed the 10 lepers, the Bible says—*airo*—they lifted up their voices. Jesus is always lifting us up. And that’s what a sermon should do—not drag us down in the dust—but lift us up.

So, here’s the good news! When, in our lives for whatever reason, we find ourselves dragging along in the dust--when it feels like life is barren and meaningless—when we are not bearing fruit—the Father’s first instinct is NOT to cut us off. Like any good vineyard owner, who loves and cares about his grapevines, God’s first thought is to lift us up and help us reach the light. Jesus says he lifts up the branches that are not bearing fruit, so that they can begin to bear; and he prunes the branches that are bearing fruit so that they become even more fruitful. The idea is that our God loves us enough to give us a free UPGRADE. But, be patient. It may take time. Did you know that after you plant a grapevine in the ground it takes 3-4 years before the vine begins to produce grapes? Over those three years, the roots reach down into the soil. The vine grows strong. Then branches begin to bear fruit. But it takes another 5-6 years of carefully pruning and lifting up the branches before the vine will bear an abundance of fruit of the kind and

quality it takes to make wine. Jesus, the Lord of space and time makes it happen in our lives—if we abide in him.

What does the fruit look like? I believe the fruit becomes evident in the way we live our lives, in the way we treat one another, in the way we witness to our faith. Did you read and listen to the stories about Tammy Jo Shults, the Southwest Airlines pilot who saved her plane? An engine exploded at 30,000 feet; a passenger was killed. But she successfully landed the plane and then she calmly greeted the passengers as they stepped off the aircraft. Did you see that story? Here's what's strange--CNN, ABC, the New York Times and the Associated Press made absolutely no mention of the fact that Tammy Jo Shults is a committed Christian. It was an article in the Washington Post that said "Her (Tammy's) mother-in-law also describes her as a devout Christian with a faith she thinks may have contributed to her calm state amid the emergency landing." "I know God was with her and I know she was talking to God," Virginia Shults said. A Reuters news article reported that she is, "A Christian who is married to a fellow pilot and has two children, Shults said that sitting in the captain's chair gave her a chance to witness for Christ on almost every flight." After the plane landed safely one of her passengers said, "God sent his angels to lift us up." That's what God does. *Airo*—He lifts us up. He gives us the UPGRADE we need so that our lives can be even more fruitful.