

Kingdom People Produce Kingdom Fruit

Text: Matthew 21:43

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KINGDOM FRUIT

"The kingdom of God will be ... given to a people
producing its fruits" (Matthew 21:43).

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS' in Jesus.

In 1998, the National Youth Gathering of The LCMS was held in Atlanta, Georgia. When one travels to Atlanta, one cannot help but notice the name of one of the main streets running through the city is Peachtree Street. And on the south end of Atlanta one can also find Peachtree City. This isn't a surprise to anyone who knows anything about Georgia. After all, Georgia is well-known for its' delicious peaches. It's even called The Peach State.

However, Georgia is not unique in being known for its' fruit. For example, if one were to think of the state of Washington, you would likely think of apples. If you thought of Hawaii, delicious pineapples would come to mind. And similarly, a mention of Florida brings oranges to mind. In fact, all 50 of the United States have an official fruit associated with their state, ranging from pears to blueberries to strawberries, even huckleberries. And for those of you who don't know it, the official fruit of Illinois is Goldrush apples. The point is that each state is known for the fruit it produces.

Now, just as states are known by the fruits they produce; the kingdom of God is recognized by the fruit its' people produce. Of course, this fruit is different than that which is found on normal vines or branches. **Kingdom people produce Kingdom fruit.**

In fact, the production of kingdom fruit is a very special task given to kingdom people by the almighty God. The importance of this task cannot be over-stressed, especially when you realize that both the kingdom and the task of producing kingdom fruit has been taken away from those who failed to produce any kingdom fruit, because they cut themselves off from the vine, Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 21 the Jewish religious leaders refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. As a result, Jesus told them this parable:

"There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus said to them, "Have you not read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people producing its' fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and if it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (Matthew 21:33-44).

Finally, Matthew 21:45 says, "**When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parable, they perceived that he was speaking about them.**" Their perception was correct. The chief priests and the Pharisees had not been producing kingdom fruit. And they were not producing kingdom fruit, because they were not truly kingdom people. And they were not kingdom people, because they were blowing off Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, Who IS the ONLY SOURCE OF LIFE sinners have. Not only did they want Jesus out of their lives, they wanted Him dead. But before we lay the blame for Jesus' death at their feet alone, we must always remember that the sinner in each of us would rather nail Jesus to the cross, than to believe that we're included in Jesus' forgiving death for the forgiveness of our sins. In other words, the sinner in each of us wants Jesus dead too, because He gets in the way of our fun, and producing the fruits of sin, in our own little kingdoms, in which we sit on the throne of our lives

But there is always a deadly consequence to remaining in one's sin, rather than turning from it in repentance. Jesus stated in no uncertain terms, "**Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people producing its fruits,**" (Matthew 21:43). And who's that referring to? Kingdom people – true believers, who love God above all else, because "**He first loved us above all else, and gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins,**" 1st, John 4. These words of rejection, spoken to those who denied Jesus as their Savior, also carry special emphasis for all of us who have been given the kingdom of God. The emphasis of His message is just as strong to the new tenants today, including you and me: "**The kingdom of God will be given to a people producing its fruits.**" What does this mean? Fruit production is expected of kingdom people. Or, as our theme puts it: "*Kingdom people produce kingdom fruit.*"

Through God's Word and Sacrament, by God's grace in Christ Jesus, we have been grafted into the Risen, Living, and Life-Giving Vine, Jesus Christ, and have been made Kingdom People. God's people are the Vineyard of the Lord, here on earth, to produce fruit for the Vineyard owner – our Lord. And our place in the God's kingdom or vineyard is fully undeserved. Romans 5 says, "**While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,**". Through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus, we have been and still are reconciled to God, through the forgiveness of sins. And it was in the waters of Baptism, that our reconciliation with God, and our being grafted into the source of life – the living vine, Jesus – was given to us, as well as the faith that believes it

By faith in Jesus' shed blood, that forgave us for every sin that made God mad at us, and for which we should have been forever separated from God, we are now continually reconciled to God. By faith, we ARE tenants of God's kingdom or vineyard. By faith in Jesus, with the UPS man of the Holy Spirit, pouring the life of Jesus, the Vine, into us, we will produce kingdom fruit. Paul puts it like this in Romans 7, "**You also have died to the law, through the body of Christ, that you may belong to Him who has been raised from the dead, so we may bear fruit for God**".

Let there be no doubt. To be kingdom people is a gift. To be alive and thriving in God's vineyard, via your being connected to the risen, living, and life-giving vine, Jesus, is the sweetest deal you've ever been given. But the point of Jesus' words today is very clear: "*kingdom people produce kingdom fruit,*" and if one is not producing kingdom fruit, out of love for Jesus, that's a warning sign, that you're either disconnecting yourself from your Life-Source, the living vine of Christ, or that you need to get your repentance and faith in line with God's Word. As Jesus warned in the parable, "**Be careful, lest the master take the vineyard from you, and will let it out to other tenants who will give Him the fruits in their season,**" Matthew 21:41. To put it in Catechism terms, this is our daily dying to sin, and our daily being raised with Christ anew, by cherishing our baptismal grafting into Jesus.

This really isn't anything new. This is what the Old Testament prophets also stressed. In our Old Testament lesson Isaiah says, "**My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines – that planting is your baptismal planting in the kingdom of God - and he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield good grapes, but it yielded only sour grapes**". Our being lavishly loved and freely forgiven by Jesus, changes those who take Jesus up on the deal, into being good trees in His vineyard. To which Jesus then tells us in the Gospel, "**A good tree will produce good fruit!**" And to those who were only producing the sour grapes of sin, John the Baptist warned them in Matthew 3, "**Bear fruit in keeping with your repentance.**"

Which leads us to ask the obvious question: "What does kingdom fruit look like?" Here's what it looks like:

- We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things; rather than worshiping all of our false gods: the belly god, the pleasure god, the money god, the sleep god, the popularity god, the sports god, and so on.
- We should call on God's name with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, instead of using it to curse and swear.
- We should hold God's Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it; rather than worshiping at St. Mattress.
- We should honor and obey all of God's authorities, rather than anger and disobeying them.
- We should hold all life, at every stage of existence sacred, and help our neighbor in every physical need, rather than hurting, hating, or harming them.
- We should save sex for marriage, rather than seeing how many people we can become one-flesh with.
- We should use all of our possessions to God's glory – so if the Lord blesses you with a pool, be sure to invite the youth group and the pastors' family over, not to mention your unbelieving neighbor.
- We should speak well of and defend everyone in the best way possible, rather than gossiping and belittling
- And we should be content, happy, and satisfied with what God gives us in life, rather than sinful desiring what He hasn't given us in this life.

That's just a short summary of what kingdom fruit looks like. But if you want to be even more concise terms, Jesus tells us what kingdom fruit looks like when He says, "**Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.**" Of finally, Paul summarizes what Kingdom fruit looks like when he says in Galatians 5:22-23, "**The fruits of the spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness faithfulness, and self-control.**"

On the one hand, those lists are a tall order. On the other hand good trees naturally produce good fruit, and you are good, you are a forgiven, good and righteous tree in God's vineyard, in Jesus Christ, your Savior. If in your life and mine, we are not producing the kingdom fruits listed above, it's because our sin is getting in the way of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, working those fruits in us. So we need to get out of the way of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, by repenting of our sins, and our being bad trees producing the bad fruits of sins, or sinful vines producing sour grapes. And we need to let the living vine, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, Who pours the life giving, fruit-bearing sap, of Jesus' forgiveness into us, we need to let them have their way with us. As John the Baptist put it, "**I must decrease, and He, Jesus, must increase.**" How? You give Jesus the steering wheel of your life, through faith, and then you just go along for the most joyful, invigorating, fruitful ride of your life – even better than Route 66.

When Jesus is in the driver's seat of your life, He graciously nurtures us, and generously gives us everything we need to produce fruit for the kingdom. Jesus said in Matthew 21, "**The master ... planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower.**" And our Lord did all of this, before turning over His vineyard, to us Baptized tenants. In other words, the Lord supplies everything we, the tenants, need to produce fruit.

The same is still true today. Jesus says in John 15, ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, will bear much fruit ... And I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit"***

The key question for each of us is: "Does the fruit of your service match the generosity of God's nurture?" God simply gave us a place in His kingdom or vineyard, through the shed blood of Jesus. He placed a fence around the vineyard – one could see the fence in different way – but think of it as the forgiving blood of Jesus, which is like a Teflon coating, so that all of the devil's accusations against, fall right off us, because through Jesus' blood, the devil can't make his charges against us stick; because we're forgiving. The vineyard owner placed a winepress in it. Think of Jesus being crushed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His forgiving blood began to flow from His sacred veins, so that through Baptism, the word, and the Lord's Supper, we receiving life-giving forgiveness from our crucified and risen Vine, and finally he put up a tower in it – think of the cross, as the tower that protects us from our enemies, and keeps us alive in the vineyard of God.

We have the warning of what happens to those who do not respond to Vineyard owner's generosity, who reject His Word and His Son, and who do not produce kingdom fruit, because they're too busy producing the bad and sour fruit of sin. The kingdom will be taken away. Therefore, with repentant hearts, and forgiven lives, Colossians 3 tells us, ***"Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*** Our being forgiven by Jesus for everything we ever did wrong, and our being given a way out of our graves when we die through Jesus' resurrection, are the life-giving nutrients, that give us life, and re-voigorate us to live our lives for Jesus, who is and always will be the only source of life and love for us.

For those to whom the kingdom has been given, it's fruit production season. God's grace, this is what the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) does. They make it very clear that it's the Savior's dying love, and His blood-bought gift of redemption that has given them a place in God's vineyard, and the enables them to be kingdom people, who produce kingdom fruit.

From our churches to our communities, to our nation, and to the world, the LMWL has been gathering for over 75 years, the Mission Mites of pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and bills, to carry out message of Jesus' forgiveness and mercy to people everywhere. "Kingdom people producing kingdom fruit" is what the LWML, and all Christians do.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said, ***"A good tree bears good fruit"***. And you have been forgiven in Jesus' blood, and you have been made good in Jesus' goodness, to daily blossom with the fruits of repentance, faith, and all the kingdom fruit of God, to the glory of our living vine, and forgiving Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).
Amen.