

John 15:9-17 – “*Life in the Produce Aisle*”
Easter 6 – May 5, 2024

How do you refer to HyVee, Jewel, Kroger, Aldi’s or other similar places? These days most people label those establishments as supermarkets, giving testimony to the fact that you can literally buy everything from a to z (apples to zinc) there. But years ago these places were simply called grocery stores. Even in this fast-paced world of pre-packaged and prepared foodstuffs, there still is a remnant of simpler, basic times in the fact that the “green groceries,” that is, the produce – the fresh fruits and vegetables- get a prominent place. The produce aisle is generally near the entrance of the store, capturing your immediate attention. It is wider than normal, with larger bins. There are islands of special displays. There are usually large misting units to keep the produce fresh. Those who are health conscious know that shopping and eating from the produce aisle is good for you.

A living, produce-like faith is our focus for today. We continue the readings from John 15 which we heard last week. Then the emphasis was on “connectivity,” we might say. Remember our Lord’s words that He is the vine and we are the branches who *abide* or *remain* in Him. Today we take the next theological step - from connectivity to productivity. Jesus concludes this section of John 15 by saying, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.*” Living a fruitful, productive Christian life is not an option for the people of God. It’s what we do. It’s who we are. It’s how we live. Let’s explain that as we approach this text from a three-fold perspective: “*Life in the Produce Aisle*” is 1) motivated by the Savior, 2) guided by the commandments, and 3) governed by a different perspective.

Life in the produce aisle is, first of all, motivated by the Savior. Remember what Jesus said last week, “*apart from Me, you can **do nothing.***” Today He says (v. 16), “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.*” Those whom the Lord chooses He uses. Those whom the Lord appoints He anoints and equips for the task. He has called us from the death of sin to walk in the newness of life. He laid down His life not just as a demonstration of love, but as an atoning sacrifice that moves us to love and serve Him, as well as to love and serve our neighbor (the people He puts into our life) in return. St. John says it so well in his first epistle, “*We love because He **first** loved us.*” Christian good works are not the cause of faith, but the fruit of faith. They are not demanded; they come naturally. They don’t originate within us; they are motivated by God.

The Catechism is always helpful in explaining theological truth. The explanation to the First Article of the Creed talks about all that God gives us out of “*fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in me,*” and goes onto say, “*for all this is it my duty to thank and raise, serve and obey Him.*” Then in the Second Article, describing the person and work of Jesus for us, the explanation describes what happens

next, *“that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”* The Third Article ties it all together when it says the Holy Spirit, *“calls me by the Gospel, enlightens me with His gifts, and sanctifies and keeps me in the true faith.”* That’s a summary of our first point: life in the Christian produce aisle is motivated by the Savior, whose life, death, resurrection, ascension and return brings us the love of God and the power of the Spirit.

Secondly, Christian life in the produce aisle is guided by the commandments. Initially that statement might sound strange to you. We usually talk about the Law first and then the Gospel. We think of the Law as a demand; the Gospel as a promise. But remember that the Law has multiple uses. Yes, it curbs our sin and identifies our sin. But it also guides us in Christian living. Law and Love can go together. That’s why Jesus says in our Gospel, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,”* and our epistle says, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.”* Think of the commandments not just as an order, but as a description of the Christian life. They describe not just what you should and shouldn’t do, but what you will and won’t do as a child of God. Christian love is more than just being nice and not being “judgmental;” it is framed and directed by the commandments. We respect parents and other authorities, we don’t undermine them. We help and befriend others instead of hurting and harming them; we lead a chaste and decent life, honoring the marriage bed instead of lusting, fantasizing, and fornicating about and with someone to whom we aren’t married; we speak well of others and respect their property, rather than slandering and defaming them and seeking to get or desiring what is theirs. In short, as Jesus said, we *love our neighbor as ourselves*, and we treat them as we would want them to treat us.

Those who don’t fully understand Christianity think that our faith only consists of a “bunch of rules.” Furthermore, they extend this false assertion to conclude that being a Christian “takes away all the fun” of life. That is simply not so, and it leads us to the third point we want to make about “life in the produce aisle;” namely, it is governed by a different perspective. Jesus says in verse 11, *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”* Then He goes on to say, *“No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*

There you have it. Living the Christian life is not a burden, but a blessing; not a job, but a joy. Servants act because they *have* to; friends act because they *want* to. Christians don’t act out of compulsion, but out of love. They are not selfish, but selfless. Jesus makes all the difference. He laid down His life for us. He rose in triumph. He lives within us so that we can bear fruit. Connected to Him we can live productive lives for the glory of His Name, for the good of our neighbor, and for the joy that comes to us as a result. God help us. Amen.

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