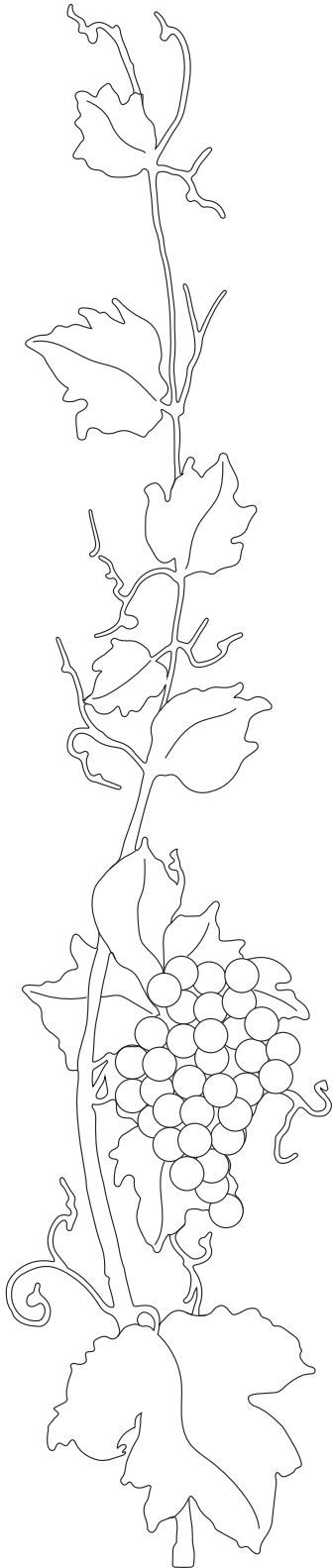


I am the vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without me.

—John 15:5 NIV



Without Christ, we can do nothing; through Him is the only way we have forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus Christ is our strength, our connection, and our help for life.

Sermon Background: It is not Bethesda's goal to point out differences or disabilities, rather remind the listeners we all need the *Christ Connection* regardless of our abilities. Hopefully, each speaker will use personal examples and illustrations specific to his congregation to discuss the importance of a Godly connection vs. a worldly connection. It is also our hope each speaker will discuss the importance of outreach, focusing on those who are often forgotten or marginalized. Examples of such groups could include: those who have disabilities, those in nursing homes, those in institutions, those considered shut-ins, those who may be away at college or the military, or those who are incarcerated. We include all people because, **together, we are all people of the Vine**, and the Holy Spirit keeps us tight on Vine (Jesus).

Theme Bible Verse: *I am the vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without me.* John 15:5 NIV

Goal: People will recognize their need for staying personally and spiritually connected to Christ, and will recognize who and what keeps that connection strong.

Malady: The devil, the world, and our sinful nature are continuously tempting us to disconnect from Christ. We cannot do anything of spiritual significance without Jesus.

Means: God continues to hold us close to Himself. God keeps us connected to Christ through His Word and Sacraments, through Christian worship, and fellowship with other Christians.

Opening Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, You know our spiritual condition; we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to our world to be that Savior. We know His death saved us and paid the price of our forgiveness. Thank You for keeping us connected to Christ at all times. In His name we pray. Amen.

Sermon Introduction: Use a story to introduce the concept: *connecting to a power source*. For example, the planning involved with a Super Bowl party does no good if the TV is not plugged in so all can watch.

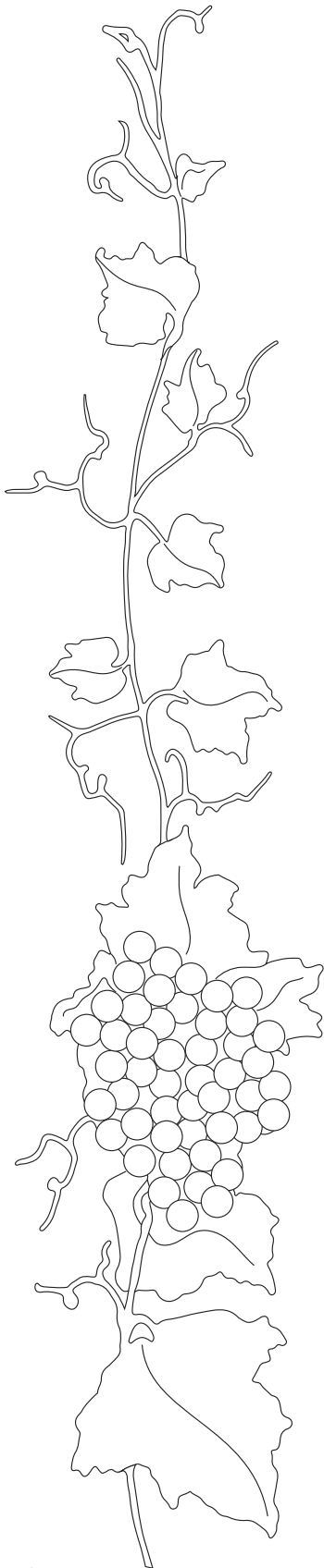
Sermon Outline: *The Christ Connection*

I. Who are you connected to? Who are you intentional about staying connected to?

1. Is it family, friends, co-workers, God?
2. Some people are less likely to be connected: elderly, people with disabilities, the forgotten.

II. There is a media push to stay connected through technology and social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linked-in. But are we really connected?

1. Does media help us truly understand and know each other?
2. Does media give us true interaction and unity with our community?
3. Does social networking show the good, the bad, and the ugly, or only what people want us to perceive their life is like?
4. What about those who are often forgotten or marginalized?
5. If we feel we are personally connected, is it in a worldly way or a spiritual way?
6. Are we more connected with the world than with God?



Transition: We tend to pride ourselves on all our connections. "I have 300 friends!" But are we more connected to our electronic devices than we are with the people we think we are connected to on the other end of those devices? Even when we try to help others make connections, for example people with disabilities, we connect them more with earthly things: bowling, picnics, BINGO, sports, and social activities. Do we follow Christ's command and offer opportunities to recognize Jesus working in our lives? Do we encourage and support worship, Bible studies and Christian fellowship?

III. How is our spiritual connection?

1. Jesus' illustration of the vine and branches (John 15:5)
 - a. A branch must be connected to the vine to live; if not, it dies.
 - b. Branches can do nothing by themselves; all life is dependent upon the vine.
2. Jesus Christ is the Vine. He tells us, "*I am the Vine; you are the branches.*" Because of God's great love for us, we have been connected to Jesus.
 - a. Connected to Christ, we are forgiven.
 - b. Connected to Christ, we are able to bear fruit, live the life God calls us to live.
 - c. Connected to Christ, we have life, abundant life now, and an eternal life in heaven.
 - d. Our connection, regardless of our abilities, is vital for life now and forever.
3. This *means of connection* is called *grace* and is a gift for all people from Christ.
 - a. We receive, know and understand God's gift of grace through Scripture, prayer, baptism, communion, worship, and Christian fellowship.
 - b. All people need Scripture, prayer, baptism, communion, worship and Christian fellowship opportunities. This is the way God keeps us connected to the Vine (Jesus).
4. Jesus (the Vine) holds onto us (the branches). Consider the way the sap flows.
 - a. Life, mercy, love and forgiveness all flow from Jesus to us through His death and resurrection.
 - b. Jesus abides in us so we may live in Him and for Him.
 - c. Jesus produces the fruits of faith in us when we witness to others.
 - d. Jesus promises to never leave us, never forsake us.
 - e. Jesus is the connection, the Vine; **together, we are People of the Vine.**

Conclusion: People of all abilities, all languages, all cultures and all races, are together, people of the Vine, Jesus. We are all God's beloved people, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. God be praised! He has made us and keeps us part of such a fruitful Vine!

Today's challenge: Consider those who may be forgotten or marginalized. How can you make a difference in their lives? How can you show the love of Christ to them? How can you help them recognize their need for the *Christ Connection*?

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we confess we have often been more concerned with connecting with this world than with You. Forgive us, Lord. Keep us securely connected to You through Your Word and Sacraments, prayer and worship. We know we can do nothing without You. Thank You for Your gift of forgiveness and a life connected to You forever in heaven. In Your most precious name we pray. Amen.

Supporting Scriptures: Matthew 15:7-8, Hebrews 13:5-8