

SINCE YOU CAN BE ANYTHING, BE...



I vividly remember the elementary school writing project, "What do you want to be," because I was literally crushed by the poor grade I received. At that time in my life, my grades in school defined me. The teacher gave me a D because I wanted to BE a lot of things and the assignment was to choose only one. But I didn't just want to be just one thing - I wanted it all. I

would start by being a professional baseball player like Al Kaline. When my Hall of Fame career was over, I would be selected and trained as an astronaut at NASA. I would be the first pro athlete to travel in space and walk on a planet. (I was cutting edge before billionaire Yasuku Maezawa and his aspirations.) After this accomplishment, the United States would certainly want to elect me as President. Then, when my consecutive terms were done, I would retire wherever presidents go - Mar-a-Lago I guess. Can you believe that this received a poor grade?

But I didn't become any of those things. I was drafted by the Phillies but my father said I had to go to college - where I met my soul mate and partner for life. We left school and I joined the family business of farming. Even though my parents and family, my dorm mates, and my rural community (who may have just wanted me off the farm) always suggested that I had missed my calling to be a pastor. But that wasn't what I wanted to BE. I certainly desired to be a disciple of Jesus but I had far greater dreams. The American dream is the possibility of being anything you could dream of. And I had plenty of dreams. You may remember the comedian Yakov Smirnoff. He said when he first came to America from Russia he wasn't prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in our grocery stores. He said, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, what a country!"

There isn't any powder that instantly makes one a disciple of Jesus. But the great, powerful and freeing Gospel truth is that it's 100% about what God does in you, not what you desire to BE. Jesus said in John 15: "I am

the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing... You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (John 15:5, 16).

BE a fruit-bearing branch connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ.

Sharing the Gospel is relational - equipped by the Vine and relating to the world bearing the fruit of God. We are all called to be imitators of God, ambassadors for Christ - but this eternal life-changing significance isn't from us, it's from God working and living in us as His temple, His Body, the Church. You could probably sing along with me these words famously sung by Dionne Warwick: "What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. No, not just for some, but for everyone."

When I watch the protests, the violence, the shouting, the anger, the hatred, the racism, the tolerance of sin in the world - and that's just in 30 minutes of the news - I pray: Lord, what can I BE in this world that could possibly make a difference? Equip me. Empower me. Send me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The other day I saw a church sign that simply read: "**Since you can be anything, be kind.**" Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. BE a fruit-bearing branch connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ, and a temple where the Holy Spirit produces fruit. Wow!! I didn't need to be a pro athlete, an astronaut, president or even a pastor. But a branch connected to Christ bearing the Spirit's fruit.

In his book, "Mere Christianity", C.S. Lewis wrote, "God has designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. That is why it is no good asking God to make us happy without bothering about religion. God cannot give happiness and peace apart from Himself because it is not there. There is no such thing."

Bearing fruit is not Law, it's the promise of the Gospel. **If you were to write an essay right now, how would you respond: Since I can be anything, I will be...?** To know who you are and who you want to be is to say. I am a poor, miserable sinner. Not just in what I do, but in what I am and who I try to be. And so that's the fruit we produce naturally, on our

own. Bad fruit, sinful fruit, or no fruit at all. But when we sinful branches are engrafted onto the One True Vine, Jesus Christ and His Spirit, when He abides in you and you in Him, something happens. You are forgiven. God's grace flows through you. And through that unconditional grace and forgiveness, you become something altogether different, something other than what you were before or even greater than you dreamed you would be – you become a child of God. A branch connected to the Vine, bearing the good fruits of repentance and faith, the fruits of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And therefore because of who YOU ARE in Jesus, you bear fruit. You bear fruit because your Heavenly Father promised He would. He is the Vinedresser who does not just plant us in our Savior, His life, His Spirit and then leave us on our own to be whatever we dream to be. He nurtures us in Word and Sacrament, equips us in His Word, cares for our every need of body and soul and prepares us to BE who WE ARE - now and for eternity: HIS. Could there be anything more significant than that? Certainly not!

At those times I served as a pastor/principal, morning announcements included reciting the following:

I am somebody.
I am a child of God.
Chosen. Precious. Forgiven. Loved.
All Unconditionally. Always 24/7.
I will respect others as I wish to be respected myself.
I will use words that build up, never tear down.
God has the Spirit's fruit for me to bear.
Apart from Him, I can and will do nothing.
But I can do all things with Christ who strengthens me.
The One who lives in me is greater than he who is in the world.
This is the day the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

What the world needs now is branches of the Vine who bear the fruit of the Spirit. In our great country - that needs to return to the Lord - you can BE anything. You could be frustrated, angry, vengeful - the list is endless. But as branches of the One True Vine, we don't have a choice to choose when we exhibit integrity and when we do not. That's the way of the sinful world. But to BE who you are in Christ is a life of significance. It's what our world

needs now. And those fruits that He has told us He desires to produce in each and every one of us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control - make a difference in the world where you live. Those things may look small and unimpressive to the world, and maybe even to us at times, but not to God. These fruits of faith are exactly what He wants to produce in you and has promised that He will.

Since you can be anything, BE exactly who you are in Christ. Since it's all about God and not us - you can be sure God has a plan not only to bear fruit in you but also to make a difference through you in all that you say and do as HIS. Thanks be to God.

The English District is full of fruit-bearing branches of the One True Vine. We see evidence of this fruit in our churches, schools and in our communities. One weekly newsletter can't begin to tell all of the stories - but we would like to hear yours. To share it with our District. Can you share a time when God bore fruit in you - at work, in your neighborhood or even in your church? How did it make a difference? Please share your stories at EvangelizationTeam@englishdistrict.org We are also looking for branches just like you to serve on our Team. Prayerfully consider it. We are fellow children of God, branches connected to the Vine, who share a sense of urgency to bear HIS fruit in our world.

Bearing God's Fruit Together,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20