



# **DON'T WORRY, IT'S GOING TO BE A GOOD CROP THIS YEAR!**

Grace/Caminando con Jesús Lutheran Church

Easter 5 (B)

May 3, 2015

Pastor David J Salinas

## SERMON TEXT

### Acts 16:11-15

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#### ✝ IN NOMINE JESU ✝

What does the crop forecast look like for us this year in the Yakima Valley? Not good. The lack of snow this past winter has produced drought conditions. They're talking about rationing the water supply for irrigation. In some fields in Wapato this is already taking place. One of our Hispanic worshipers in charge of irrigating the fields told me that he went to water a certain section, turned on the spigot, and water trickled out. I asked him the good Lutheran question but a fairly dumb one in this case—What does this mean?

He said, "Whaddya' think it means, the fruit's not going to grow."

When I hear reports like these, all I can say is the Lord Jesus is giving us one more reason to pray and receive his deliverance in response to our prayer, just as he promised. So, let's actually take a moment to pray for our people and land: *Lord Jesus, Lord of the literal harvest fields, even as you are of the spiritual harvest fields, please show yourself merciful and mighty, and bless our farmers, orchardists, workers, and local economy for the good of your people and church. In your name we pray. Amen.*

But, now what's the forecast for Grace Lutheran Church & School? What is the forecast for you, dear living branch of the living Vine, Christ Jesus, our Lord? Hey, it's been a tough year as a church. Let's be honest about it. No need to hide and pretend it hasn't. We've faced some challenging and painful moments in the not too distant past. We've suffered losses. And, what's true of us as a church has also been true of many of us, individually. Many of us have and are facing challenges, stresses, difficulties,

and losses. When I look at the funeral count between us and Redeemer I think we've done our part to fill heaven. So, to ask the good Lutheran question, and, maybe, not such a dumb one this time around—What does this mean? Well, I don't know for sure how the fruit and vegetable harvest will turn out. But one thing I do know and want to reassure you of, and so have you leave here today beaming with comfort, confidence, and a renewed commitment to our church and school and the ministry of Grace/Caminando con Jesús is this—***Don't Worry, It's Going to be a Good Crop This Year!*** How do you know, Pastor? How can you be so sure? You ask. Because, in the first place...

### **1.The Father protects the branches from the harsh climate!**

Farmers and orchardists do the best they can to protect the crop with wind machines, heaters, and water, but, as I was reminded yet again by one of our own orchardists, finally, they can only do so much. So much is beyond their control. Thankfully, that is not the case with our heavenly Father. All things are well under his control. Look at how perfectly he protected the living and fruitful branches that were Paul, Luke, Silas, and their missionary companions in our text. In their Spirit-produced fruitfulness resulting from their faith in Christ, Paul, Luke and company, started heading west to Macedonia in response to Paul's vision of a Macedonian man begging him to come and tell them about Jesus. And so, Luke pens this entry in his nautical travel log: ***"From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi."*** When we read these words, as important as what Luke tells us is what he doesn't. What does he *not* tell us? What does Luke *not* record in his journal entry? He doesn't record any mishaps, accidents, or diseases that hampered let along stopped Paul's missionary journey. We don't hear, "From Troas we put out to

sea but the ship ran aground." Or, "we sailed straight for Samothrace but we lost Silas to illness." Or "the next day we went on to Neapolis, where the Jews ambushed us and killed Paul." We hear none of that, but you can bet dollars to donuts that those were precisely the ambushes Satan and his evil angels were setting! The devil had Paul's itinerary and mission plan pinned to the bulletin board in his war room, and you know, Satan was plotting to derail and destroy the gospel ministry of Paul and his fellow missionaries, because that gospel ministry was the death of Satan and his kingdom. But, despite Satan's plots, these missionaries arrive safely and timely at each port. How can this be? The Father effectively protects his branches from the harsh climate of Satan and sin! The heavenly Father, who "neither slumbers nor sleeps" had watched their coming and going, and frustrated and foiled Satan's schemes; the Father had surrounded our missionaries with thousands of angels as a personal bodyguard, and removed the danger before they or we were aware. We may never know what evil the Father foiled!

Let this be our comfort and confidence this day. Listen, as we think about the struggles and stresses, the losses and hurts that we face as a church and as individuals, one of the things we can be sure of is that Satan has a big bulls-eye pinned to our back; the devil means to use all of our pain and suffering to take us down, to have us shipwreck our faith and bring us to ruin. And because we face life's hardships and the knowledge of Satan's hatred with a genuine yet *imperfect* faith in Christ, we can end up victims of anxiety, worry, insecurity, and the fear of "Oh no, now what?" So, dear ones, bask in the sure and comforting point from our text—The Father protects the living branches from the harsh climate of sin and Satan! Believe it!

I want to reinforce that comfort-giving, confidence and joy-boosting point from our text from our own personal history and

experience. The other day I was reading in that special supplement of the Yakima Herald "Stories From Our Families." In the publication was the story of Peggy Lenderman, a 103 year-old Yakimite. What made the story so special was her harrowing account of how she survived the Spanish Flu of 1918, a pandemic that was more devastating than the Bubonic Plague of the 14th century; the Spanish Flu killed 20 - 40 million people world-wide and hit the Yakima Valley hard. At the same time I had been catching up on my Grace history. I read entry after entry from the inception of our church in 1905. The history told of the installation of Pastor Soll in 1912, the monthly meeting of the ladies group in 1913, the construction of a frame building for meetings in 1914. As important as what the history said, was what it didn't. What entry do you think was missing? Any from 1918! There was no entry telling how the Spanish Flu killed Pastor Soll and the leaders of the 13 year old congregation! But, how can that be? Satan had just the tool in that strain of influenza to wipe out Grace Lutheran and nip his enemy in the bud! How did that *not* happen? Because the Father, your heavenly Father, so loved our forebears and so loved *you* and me to protect those living branches, so that they lived to tell the story, the old, old story of Jesus and his love, the story that saves souls, the story that has made and continues to make of you and me living and fruitful branches! And the fact is you and I have made it here today and heard the great good news that keeps us connected to Christ, the Vine, and, thereby, keeps us alive and fruitful—Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.—we have heard those words here and now because the Father has summoned thousands of angels to be our personal bodyguard, and he has removed the danger and foiled Satan's plots that we are not aware of and may never be!

And so, I joyfully and confidently assure you my dear people and fellow living branches, ***Don't Worry, It's Going to be a Good***

**Crop This Year!** We will survive and even thrive and bear much fruit despite the harsh climate of sin and Satan in which we live. We surely will because **the Father protects the living branches from the harsh climate!** And I guarantee a good crop for us this year, because in second place...

## 2. The Vine produces fruit in the soil of weekly worship!

What's the #1 complaint about church from people who don't go to church? Here's a hint: It's also the #1 complaint about church from people who do go! *Church is Boring!*

So, how about it dear people of Grace, tell me...Do you ever find church boring? (\*Gasp\* Oh no, Pastor Salinas! Never!) Now, let me be clear. By that I don't really mean do you ever come to church, and not find it entertaining. I think we can all agree that we don't come to church to be entertained; we come to worship the Most High God who created and rescued us! Worship is about him not about us! Nor, do I really mean, Do you ever try to take a sneak peak at your watch because the sermon is dragging. Nor do I mean, Do you ever find yourself distracted and unable to pay attention because the kids are rowdy, the pain is throbbing, the medication is kicking in, the long work week is finally catching up with you; the memory is nagging, Did you turn off the stove before you left the house? I don't really mean any of those things. What I really mean by Do you find church boring is Do you ever find worship ineffective and *fruitless*? Have you ever felt or wondered, Does this really matter and make a difference? Does this really help? Is this really working like it's supposed to? Is this truly worth my time and effort to come and sit and listen and sing? A professor of mine once talked about writing a memoir of his time as a parish pastor and professor, and titling it "Spitting in the Wind." At times, it seemed to him like his preaching didn't really seem to matter all that much or make a difference.

Well, for those times when we feel this way I just have three words to say—*Lydia of Thyatira*. Is church effective? Is it fruitful, and so, is it the most thrilling and wonderful hour of the entire week? As my Eva likes to say, “You bechya!” Look at the worship where Paul presided as pastor! There was not much for entertainment. There was no state-of-the art stadium with all the bells and whistles and rock band. There wasn’t even a building, just a few women by a river, around a Bible. But, when Paul “**sat down and began to speak,**” speak about Jesus, when he proclaimed law and gospel, what happened? Christ, the Vine, produced abundant fruits of faith in Lydia’s heart! Luke tells us that, “**The Lord opened [Lydia’s] heart to respond to Paul’s message.**” The Vine produced faith and new life in him in worship. Then, what happened? Then, what fruits did the Vine produce through the preaching of the good news of him at church? How about the fruit of evangelism. Look how Lydia used her position in life as Mom to bring others to Jesus. She made sure that not only she but the members of her household were also baptized. Then, there was the fruit of financial stewardship of supporting the gospel financially. Lydia used here station in life of business woman to support the spread of the gospel. Luke tells us that Lydia was “**a dealer in purple cloth.**” That was a lucrative business. Lydia was loaded, and she looked for a way to use her God-given wealth to support her church, and she found it! “**Come, stay at my house,**” she insisted to Paul and the others. This was financial support. Staying at her house and providing for the missionaries enabled them to carry out their mission of preaching Christ!

Is church boring? Is it ever ineffective and fruitless? Is it ever powerless, worthless, and just “spitting in the wind,”? Absolutely not! Church, worship where Christ-crucified and his word is preached in all its truth and the sacraments are administered

according to Christ's institution, *that* worship is always powerful and productive, always effective and fruitful, and, therefore thrilling and wonderful, because Christ, the Vine is always streaming his life-force, his resurrection power into his branches through the good news of him, so that they remain alive, lush, and fruitful! Three more words for you to back that up: *People of Grace!* You come to church and hear this great good news in the liturgy, in the hymns, in the sermon and sacraments—Because of Jesus and through him, God sees you as holy, as pure, as righteous, as legitimate a child of his as Jesus is! Your family and relatives don't see you that way. Your friends and co-workers don't see you that way. But your God sees you that way! Through faith in Jesus, know this, God is not bored with you. He is *pleased* with you! You and I hear that, and by hearing it, Christ, the Vine, produces the fruit—we believe it! We love to hear that news! The Vine, then, moves us to use our positions and gifts in life, our money and energy and time to love and serve the people in our lives, and to love and serve our church!

You can never tell from year-to-year how the harvest in our valley is going to be. Some years the crop will be really good; others, like, maybe this year, not so much. But when it comes to you and me, when it comes to our church and ministry, ***Don't you worry, it's going to be a good crop!*** It's going to be a good crop this year and every year in Christ, *guaranteed!* After all, this is the Father's glory—that we bear abundant fruit! And so, he will continue to protect us living branches from the harsh climate and the Vine will continue to make us fruitful in the soil of weekly worship. And the prayer we pray over the crop that is us, our loved ones, and others that come to us will always be: "Thank you, Lord, for a fruitful harvest!" Amen.

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

