



Going Out On A Limb

Read: Luke 13:1-9

Ever feel disconnected? I am sure we have all felt this way at certain times in our lives. Although moments of solitude are good for the body and mind, we were not meant to live in a permanent state of disconnect. We were designed to stay connected to God, our parish community, our family and our friends. Being connected helps us to stay healthy and bear fruit.

Whenever I read this rather challenging passage I am immediately drawn to Jesus' words in John's gospel, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (15:5). Those who do not stay connected to Jesus do not produce the fruit they were intended to bear. When we fail to repent of our sins we essentially disconnect ourselves from God's plan for our lives. God wants us to flourish, grow and produce fruit. He wants us to be the best version of ourselves. Disconnecting hurts growth.

We can't grow on our own; we need to connect with others. We need God, a church community and the support of others in order to bear fruit in our lives. As Jesus says, "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit" (Matthew 7:18). That is why Jesus warns us in this week's gospel that someone who does not stay connected to God could experience spiritual death.

How do we know if we are connected? Jesus says, "you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). The fruits of spiritual maturity are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). If we can recognize these traits in our life, then we will know that we are connected to the vine. Connection is key to growth.

But sometimes, despite our best intentions, things go wrong. Our branches get hacked, the growing conditions aren't good or other disruptions occur. In the end we have trouble bearing fruit. The good news is that God is very patient. He always gives us time to repent and get reconnected with him. The danger lies in getting comfy not producing fruit. At that point, the gardener has a tough decision to make. Instead, stay connected and you'll stay healthy.

Grow: Get involved in a parish men's or women's connect group.