We live in an interconnected world. You connect on Facebook with your friends. The Internet connects us in so many ways. How much of our shopping, emailing, banking, doctoring, even the power grid, touches the Internet, even if you do not own a computer? Or think of how phones connect us today, no matter where we are, as long as we are in range of a tower. In this interconnected world we can lose track of the most important connection of all. Our reading reminds us: **STAY CONNECTED TO Jesus.**

That is one of the truths Jesus pictures when he calls himself the true, genuine Vine. You, dear confirmands, and fellow Christians here – you are the branches. And Jesus’ picture brings home why it is so important for you and me to stay connected to him.

Why is it so important to stay connected to Jesus? Obviously, we stay connected to Jesus because we want to go to heaven. And that is true. Jesus is the only way to heaven. Anyone not connected to Jesus is a dead branch that will be thrown into hell forever. Jesus clearly says: **If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.** Only Jesus saves. Without faith in Jesus, you are a dead branch cut off for the fire. Only those connected to Jesus, like branches to the vine, will be in heaven.

But if getting to heaven is your only motive, then you are a dead branch or soon will be. Yes, if you think getting to heaven someday is the only reason staying connected to Jesus is important, then your faith is quickly drying up, if it has not already. The Gardener will cut you off. That is what happens to all too many confirmands, sometimes even before they get out of high school.

You see, if Jesus is important only for getting us into heaven, why bother with him very much until death is closer? The problem is, we do not know when we will die. And if we are just concerned about having enough faith to slide into paradise, that is an artificial faith. It is a faith that knows God’s truth but does not really trust it. A branch needs the vine continuously. Only the vine brings the sap to nourish, strengthen, and keep the branches alive. A branch connected to Jesus continuously depends on his Word of truth for strength and life.

Dear confirmands, depend on Jesus continuously. Keep feeding on his Word of truth. Don’t live your life thinking that you just need enough faith to slide into heaven. Don’t live with the attitude that wants to get by with just enough church, just enough Bible study, just enough religion, so that you have just enough faith. That is not faith. Faith depends on Jesus continuously, like a branch depending on the vine. Faith always draws its strength from his Word of truth, eager to know him and his Word better and better. Faith knows and believes that the importance of staying connected to Jesus is not just to get us into heaven someday.
We also stay connected to Jesus, the vine, to produce fruit - and not just a little bit of fruit, as Jesus says: **much fruit** - fruit you can bear each day. That fruit brings glory to God. Jesus says: **Remain in me, and I am going to remain in you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Likewise, you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.** Remain in Jesus, dear confirmands. Stay connected to Jesus to bear much fruit. Faith always wants to be producing more.

For your faith knows how great Jesus' mercy toward you is. He took us dead in sin and made us alive in himself. He washed us clean through water and Word of Baptism. He took us wild branches, rebellious against God, and grafted us on to himself, the true Vine. Through his death, you have life. Through his resurrection, you have been reconciliation to God. His blood purifies you from all sin, and he presents holy, radiant, and clean, clothed with his righteousness. **You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you**, Jesus says here. No wonder we want to stay connected to Jesus and bear much fruit! No wonder we want to grow closer to such a Savior! No wonder we want his Word to flow from the Scriptures and Sacraments into our hearts always!

So to wrap it up, Tristen and Camden, stay connected to Jesus. Stay connected through his Word and Sacraments. What a Savior you have - crucified for you and risen from the dead to give you his victory! In him alone you have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Cherish him, the true Vine. Relish his promises. Stay connected to Jesus as you remain in him and his Word remains in you. Then you will bear much fruit.

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