



# Mt Lebanon Evangelical Presbyterian Church

*Making and Growing Followers of Jesus*

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April 30, 2026

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Many thanks to all the children, youth, volunteers, and staff who poured their hearts into our Children's Sunday celebration. As Psalm 8 says, "Out of the mouths of children and infants, God has ordained praise." I loved the demonstration of Psalm 23 and how the children innocently followed the shepherd. Jesus tells us to come to Him as a child, and that was the perfect illustration. Sometimes we have no idea where He's taking us, but we can follow anyway, because He is faithful and trustworthy.

This Sunday, we are continuing our series on being "Reproducing Disciples." Crawford Loritts points to one of the passages that has been a theme for my life and my dissertation: John 15:1-8. To be fruitful disciples, the first step is to abide in the vine. We cannot bear fruit unless we are connected to the Lord. John 15:4 says, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain (abide) in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Martin Luther liked to point out that it is not our fruit that gives us the right to become part of the vine. Can a cut off branch bear fruit on its own? That's impossible! So it is only when by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that we are grafted into the vine, the Body of Christ. We can't earn our way there. God graciously brings us into the family, and it is because He poured His love out on us that then we can bear fruit.

It's the same with the people who do not know Christ. All too often Christians can fall into the trap of judging others. "Well, they certainly don't deserve God's grace!" We write people off rather than seeing them as the Lord sees them, lost sheep who are created in the image of God. He longs to bring them into the sheepfold. He wants to use us to do so, even though we did not deserve to be brought into the family either. When we realize this, when we reflect on the overwhelming, amazing grace that brought us into the vine, that is when we can begin to bear the fruit of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Loritts encourages us to work on strengthening our connection to the vine and to help others to do the same. Some of the main ways we do that are through confession, by reading the Bible, through prayer, and by yielding to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Loritts points out that we can best cling to the vine when we realize how badly we need the Lord. By spending time in confession, we learn to be honest about our struggles and failings, and we begin to realize God's incredible compassion to forgive us from all our sins. By reading the Bible, we can have a perspective shift and begin to see the world as God sees it – broken and in need of a savior. Prayer is our key to building our relationship with God. Our faith is not with a set of principles but with a person, the Person of Jesus Christ. And Christ sent us the Holy Spirit to draw us to Himself. As Paul writes in Eph 1:17, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better." That's the Spirit's biggest task—to bring us into relationship with Christ. And as we share the gospel, we can trust the Holy Spirit to be working in the other person as well. He does the hard work; we just need to invite them to "Come and see."

As you prepare your hearts for worship this Sunday, spend some time reflecting on John 15:1-8. What does it mean to you to abide in Christ? What does fruit look like? Is there someone in your life you can be praying for? A neighbor, a friend, a colleague, a classmate? May God pour out His Holy Spirit on you and on them to reveal to them the person of Jesus Christ and His truly amazing grace.

Blessings,  
Pastor Carolyn