

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
September 7, 2014**

Romans 11:17-24

GRAFTED BY GRACE

Comments for reflection:

- 1. From wild branches**
- 2. Connected to a nourishing root**
- 3. Grafted in order to produce**

**Hymns: 413 - 406 - Distribution: 402, 403, 404 -
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During my seminary training, I spent an intern year in Ottawa, Ontario. It was just outside Ottawa, in the hills of western Quebec, that I was introduced to the concept of tree grafting. One of the members made their business in maple syrup, and grafting is an important part of that business. It is a process that, in my opinion, seems like it would never work; cutting a branch off of one tree, then connecting it to another kind of tree, and hoping that the two sets of tissue would not just join together, but would actually grow and produce seems like it should be impossible. Yet, that is exactly what they would do; in effect, they were making new kinds of trees and the process allowed them to refine and create different tastes of maple syrup. And the end result was delicious. Much the same process takes place here in our state, in the orchards of eastern Washington, where farmers graft branches together to make new and better apples. And it was part of olive-producing life in the ancient Mediterranean where Paul did his mission work.

What will we learn today, as we now turn to Paul's words in Romans 11, is that this grafting procedure has been performed even closer to home, in our very own lives. What Paul describes in these words is a type of grafting by God's grace, where he takes us from wild branches, connects us to the nourishing sap of a living root, and causes us to grow and then produce in special ways.

Here is what the Apostle says to us in Romans 11:17-24 **"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the**

root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

Before you can understand Paul's illustration about us in these few verses, you need to first understand the concept that Paul has been speaking about from this point here all the way back to Romans 9, which Pastor Schewe spoke on last week. The nation of Israel, the people descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the people to whom God first gave the promise of the Savior, the people from whom Jesus Christ would come; they were different than every other person in this world, different than you and me, because when they were born into this world, they were connected to God. But through disobedience and rejection of God and his promises, they were cut off. And the rejecting portion of Israel are "the branches that have been broken off" which Paul refers to here in the first part of verse 17.

However, just because many of the original branches needed to be cut off does not mean that God's tree – and the tree refers to his kingdom, his saved people - was not going to grow and flourish. As I've said before, God is a master gardener, and he makes and keeps his tree full and strong. How does he do that when those people who were originally his people have left and rejected him? He grafts in new branches.

Paul says, **"You, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in."** Paul describes us as wild branches, and the rest of Scripture affirms what that means. David says in Psalm 51:5 that we are **"sinners from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us."** In Genesis 8:21, we are told that **"every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood."** Earlier in Romans 8, Paul said that **"the sinful mind is hostile to God"**, rebelling against God at every opportunity. And how often don't our lives of sin fit that description of wild branches. Like the untamed blackberry bushes native to our backyards that seemingly spring up randomly, and then quickly take over and create trouble with their thorns; sin works in our own lives. It is part of us by nature, and it

produces ugly results: jealousy, bitterness, anger, hostility, immorality, pride, the list goes on. When we came into this world, when we lived without Christ, our lives were defined by sin. And left unchecked, sin is an uncontrollable force in life. It quickly takes over and causes pain and suffering. Those sinful branches are what we are, and yet what does Paul say? Though you are a wild branch, you have been grafted in.

By God's grace, his undeserved love, God snipped our connection to the devil and his untamed evil, he took us off of a tree that was destined to die and be thrown to the fire, and he grafted us to a new source. He connected us to his Son, Jesus Christ, and the work that he has done. He joined us with his perfect life; he joined us with his sacrificial death on the cross; he joined us with his resurrection to life. So, we are connected to a tree that is rooted in perfection and life. We are connected to a tree that gives strength and stability.

And grafted into this tree, we **“share in the nourishing sap” (Romans 11:17)**. Connected to Christ, we are nourished by the Holy Spirit and the Means of Grace that he uses to bring God's feeding love into our lives. Through the Word, we are reminded of what Jesus has done for us to free us from sin, death and the devil. We are encouraged to grow. We are reminded of the protection that we have from evil, and the strength we have against troubles and struggles. Through baptism, we are soaked in the waters of God's everlasting love. Through the Lord's Supper, we are fed, receiving the forgiveness that we need, and we are strengthened, so that we can flourish and grow. Having been grafted into this Christ-tree, and being fed by the nourishing sap of the Word and Sacrament, we have been completely changed, from wild branches headed for hellish destruction to living branches connected to God's Kingdom.

Now as we are connected to Christ the Root and fed by the nourishing Word, we are reminded that we are grafted also to produce. God grafts us by his grace, first and foremost so that we can have forgiveness and life eternal. But as branches in his kingdom, he also grafts us to produce fruit here in this life.

As we are grafted into Christ, it ultimately changes what we produce in this life. Just as our sinful actions show a connection to Satan; the good works that are seen in our lives will always show that we are connected to Jesus. In general, our fruit will identify each one of us as Christians. The works that are seen in our lives will all have general characteristics that are similar. They will be motivated by love; they will seek the good of others; they will give glory to God. They will make people say, “That person is connected to Christ.”

But the special part of this grafting process, and what makes it exciting for us to think about, is that God also uses the unique gifts and abilities in each one of us. God has grafted you into his tree, not so that you can produce the exact same works as the person next to you. Instead, God roots you in Christ, but then uses your special gifts and abilities to produce unique and special produce unlike anything else that the Christians around you are producing.

That means that you have a special purpose in God's kingdom work. Your connection to Christ produces works for God's kingdom that can only be produced by you! So, if you are not producing, then God's kingdom is lacking that produce. Considering it in that way certainly gives importance to our lives of Christian service, doesn't it? Every day is an opportunity for us who are rooted in Christ to produce something unique and special for our God! And that can happen in our homes, it can happen in our jobs. It can happen as we speak with family; it can happen as we interact with strangers. You have special fruit to produce.

The grafting process is certainly something to marvel at, isn't it? It produces apples that grow bigger and sweeter; it produces syrups that flow with flavor. But most importantly, the grafting process has produced you. It has taken you from a wild, sin-filled branch, and connected you to a nourishing sap rooted in strength, so that you might produce unique and special fruit. And it all happens because you have been grafted by God's grace. Amen.