

Title: "Fruit"

Text: John 15:1-5

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A few years ago I started a vegetable garden in our front yard. I was thrilled to see the fruit growing from the long vines—grape tomato vines entangled with large slicing tomatoes, growing into one another, all mixed up and bound together as they reached out their leaves and branches to the sun, reds and yellows, beautiful and delicious. We couldn't eat the fruit of the vines fast enough. Even after sharing with our neighbors, we still had tomatoes that rotted on the vines, which I ended up dumping into our compost pile.

The following spring I found tomato plants growing everywhere. The rich compost must have redistributed the seeds throughout the yard. I had more tomato plants than I could handle, growing in places that I found inconvenient—like among my herbs and sweet corn. The future of any garden lies with the seeds and the soil. When the fruit dies, the seeds are set free to produce new life. The secret to new life is in the compost, with the decomposing fruit, where the seeds of life abide. Compost shows us how fruit dies its way into the future.

Jesus, the fruit of Mary's womb, dies his way into the future. With Christ, resurrected life is our future as well, a life that we die into. Not protected life. Not carefully planned life. Not predictable life. Not life as we know it. Not life as we want it. But resurrected life. Unexpected and surprising life. Miraculous life. A life that gives up all of our plans, all of our power plays, and waits with Jesus, on the cross, in weakness—a life that waits for resurrection. That's our future. The church is a fruit that dies its way into the future. We don't know what this future looks like. We can't plan for it. We can't make it happen on our own terms, on our schedule, within our designated spaces. Resurrection scandalizes our best plans for the church, and offers us something more wonderful than we could ask for or imagine.

To see this fruit that dies into resurrection, we have to spend time in the compost—the manure, the waste pile, the places where we've thrown rotten fruit, unwanted gifts. We need leaders who will not let us forget the compost, leaders who become familiar with the compost, who dig into the compost—the storehouse of gifts from the past, and discarded fruit in the present, the unwanted and forgotten and dismissed. We always seem to give our leaders the jobs we don't want to do—they are servants, after all. That's why we are asking you, Ervin, to spend time in our smelly and mucky compost—and to help us see the seeds of resurrection, to open our eyes to the beauty of God's work in the places we'd rather not step into with our clean, white shoes, without spot or wrinkle. Left to ourselves, we'd rather not get our hands dirty. We'd rather live without our compost—make it go away, export it to far off places, out of sight, out of mind. Ervin, you must show us that our compost, the discarded fruit, is the rich soil that grows us into resurrected life.

Our future is not an escape from the past or from the dead weight of rotten fruit. Instead, resurrection comes to those who wait in the darkness of the tomb

where there is no way out, and open themselves to the stirring of the Holy Spirit. To await the resurrection means we learn to live by miracles, like a tomato plant growing where we did not imagine possible. We live with and through our compost, our manure, the fruit from the Father's garden that we've thrown away.

Through the Holy Spirit, we die our way into the future, which is the life of resurrected fruit.