

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

10/24/10 **"For a Branch to Bear Fruit" John 15: 1-11**

Only human beings can contemplate the meaning of life. What is the purpose of my life? What makes my life worth living? What gives me true sense of fulfillment? All of us are compelled to ask these questions at one time or another.

In this context, let us reflect on the meaning of Jesus' words to his disciples. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

The meaning of Jesus' saying is clear. As branches rafted to Jesus the vine, we can find life's true meaning. To be instruments of Jesus' love in everyday life is what makes human life truly human.

Here non-Christians may demur at Jesus' exclusive claim of love. After all, we are loved by parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. Isn't human love just as noble and precious as Jesus' love?

There is one problem: human love is partial. It is conditional. Take parental love for example.

Parents may die for their children. They may sacrifice anything for their children. But parental love, however pure and however strong, is partial.

It is conditioned by the fact that the children are their own. It would be difficult to find a parent who will sacrifice his or her life for a stranger's child.

Then, too, parental love can degenerate into hatred under certain circumstances.

Some time ago, I watched the following shocking scene on television. The Red Cross brought to a refugee camp in Africa a truckload of food. A mother picked up a piece of bread and gave it to her infant child. Another mother took it away and gave it to her child. The two mothers started to beat each other over a piece of bread for their children.

All human love is like that. It is partial and conditional. It has the tendency to degenerate into hatred and divisiveness.

The branch by itself cannot bear fruit. The branch must constantly receive nourishment from the vine. Likewise, our conditional and impartial love cannot by itself make our human life truly human. It must be grafted to impartial and unconditional love.

Jesus is God's pure and unbounded love. On the cross he prayed for those who ridiculed and spat at him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus' love corrects and redeems human love. The world's principalities, powers, and even death cannot defy the liberating power of this pure and unbounded love.

Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. Let us be bound to him. Abiding in him, we will be able to tear down the dividing walls of hostility that separate a human being from another human being. We will be empowered to bear fruit. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches, indeed.

Thanks be to God.