



**Kingdom People
Produce Kingdom Fruit**

Text: Matthew 21:43

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In 1998, the National Youth Gathering of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod was held in Atlanta, Georgia. When one travels to Atlanta, one cannot help but notice the name of one of the main streets running through the city is Peachtree Street. In the southern Atlanta metro area, one will also find Peachtree City. Of course, finding a street and a city in Georgia with these names should be of no great surprise to anybody who knows anything about Georgia. After all, Georgia is well-known for the delicious peaches that the state's people produce. Thus, it is known as the Peach State.

However, Georgia is not unique in being known for its production of a particular fruit. For example, if one were to think of the state of Washington, one would most likely think of apples. Similarly, a mention of Florida would bring oranges to mind. In fact, all 50 of the United States have an official fruit associated with their state, ranging from pears to blueberries to strawberries, even huckleberries. The point is that each state is known for the fruit that its people produce.

Just as states are known by the fruit each produces; the kingdom of God is recognized by the fruit its people produce. Of course, this fruit is different than that which is found on common branches or vines. **Kingdom people produce kingdom fruit.**

The production of kingdom fruit is a very special task given to kingdom people by the almighty God. The importance of this task cannot be overstressed, especially when one considers the task has been taken away from others who failed at its production. This is what is taught in the Gospel reading appointed for today from Matthew 21. Let's take a closer look at this Word of God.

The context of this reading is provided in Matthew 21:23, which reads as follows:

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus addresses this immediate question by replying (as recorded in verses 24–27):

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

In this context, Jesus teaches the lesson of our Gospel reading, which was directed at their refusal to acknowledge and believe in Him as the promised Messiah. He teaches in the parable, as follows:

"There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir.

Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus said to them, "I have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (Matthew 21:33–44).

Further, the Gospel reading records, in Matthew 21:45, *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parable, they perceived that he was speaking about them.* Their perception was correct. The chief priests and the Pharisees had not been producing kingdom fruit. Now, they were rejecting the very Son of God and would be the ones who would be responsible for His death. They were following the pattern of their forefathers who had rejected the prophets and their message, which prophetic message was now being fulfilled in Jesus.

The result of their actions was stated very clearly and emphatically by Jesus. He stated in no uncertain terms, *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits* (Matthew 21:43). These words of rejection spoken to those who denied Jesus also carry special emphasis for those being given the kingdom of God. The emphasis of His message is just as strong to the new tenants. Simply stated, *The kingdom of God will be ... given to a people producing its fruits*. What does this mean? Fruit production is expected of kingdom people. Or, as the theme of this message states, "Kingdom people produce kingdom fruit."

Through Word and Sacrament, by God's grace in Christ Jesus, we are made the new people of the kingdom. We truly did not deserve this honored position. As the Scriptures declare, we were enemies of God. But in this state, God reconciled us to Himself. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, *While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son* (Romans 5:10a). Through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus, we receive this reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. In the waters of Baptism, sins are washed away and faith is given.

By faith, then, we believe in Jesus as the Son of God. By faith, then, we are tenants of God's kingdom. By faith, then, we bear fruit for the kingdom. This is in accord with the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, where he wrote, *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God* (Romans 7:4).

Let there be no doubt. To be kingdom people is a gift. The words of Jesus are clear. The kingdom of God is "given." At the same time, let it be equally understood. The production of kingdom fruit is the expectation of kingdom people. As Jesus taught in the parable, the master will *let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons* (Matthew 21:41b).

This is not a new expectation for kingdom people. It was declared of old by the prophets, as recorded in Isaiah 5: *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes* (Isaiah 5:1–2). God expects good fruit from His people. The message of John the Baptist was equally clear, *Bear fruit in keeping with repentance* (Matthew 3:8).

As people of the kingdom, we are in a new state ... not a state of the union, rather, a state of righteousness ... a state of the kingdom of God. In this new state, the production of our sanctified lives is kingdom fruit recognized through fruits of righteousness, namely, repentance, faith, works of faith, and in the making of disciples. The good news is that we are not left to this task without God's help.

As people of the kingdom of God, God graciously nurtures us and generously gives us everything we need to produce fruit for the kingdom. The words from verse 33 of the Gospel

reading remind us of what the master has done: *The master ... planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower.* All this he did before turning over the vineyard to the tenants. The master supplied everything the tenants needed to produce fruit.

The same is true today. The Lord supplies all we need. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts. (ref. *Luther's Small Catechism*, Meaning of the Third Article of The Creed.) We are connected to Jesus, who is our lifeline for bearing fruit. This is His message in John chapter 15. Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit ... I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"* (John 15:5a, 16b).

He empowers us through Word and Sacrament for this very purpose. Being fully nurtured by God, *we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work* (Colossians 1:10).

The question is, as stated in *The Lutheran Study Bible* related to Isaiah 5, "Does the fruit of your service match the generosity of His nurture?" (ref. *Lutheran Study Bible*, page 1096) As Jesus declared, *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more* (Luke 12:48).

God has been abundantly generous to us, His people. We lack nothing for the work of His kingdom. Yet, we all too often find ourselves making excuses instead of producing fruit. We even fall into the trap of the original tenants in the parable. We believe that what we possess is ours! Meanwhile, the psalmist reminds us, *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* (Psalm 24:1).

We have the warning of what happens to those who do not respond to His generosity, those who reject His Word and His Son, and those who do not produce. The kingdom will be taken away. Therefore, with repentant hearts and forgiven lives, we do well to heed the words of Colossians 3:17: *Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

For those to whom the kingdom has been given, it is fruit production season. This is what kingdom people do. By God's grace, this is what the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) does. It is well known for its emphasis on fruit production, as expressed in its pledge:

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.

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From churches to communities to the world, these Lutheran Women in Mission are well known for gathering mites for mission grants in their home districts and global work abroad. Their hands-on labors expand from congregation to community and around the world. The LWML is a blessing to many. "Kingdom people produce kingdom fruit" fits well the description of their purpose and mission.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *"Every healthy tree bears good fruit"* (Matthew 7:17). As followers of Jesus, God makes us healthy in Christ. We are in the right state, namely His kingdom. We are in the right season, the fruit-producing season. So, Kingdom People, "Produce Kingdom Fruit!" Bear forth the fruits of repentance, faith, and works of faith. Go, make disciples. May the kingdom of God be recognized by our fruit! To God alone be the glory!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). Amen.