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# “LESS IS MORE”

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John 15:1-8



MAY 3, 2015  
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In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus talks about being fruitful, producing fruit. But for some reason, this idea of producing fruit kind of rubs me the wrong way. Frankly, I'm tired of producing; don't you get tired of the constant demands to produce? It seems like that's all our society is looking for anymore. If you can produce you're in, if you can't, get out of the way.

Society has become like an overheated steam engine cranking out production and services at full steam. Production, production, production! Can you perform? How soon can you deliver? How many can you produce?

Sometimes I wonder where we're headed. If you look at our world and the way it has changed in the past decades--it's actually scary, I think. Today, we live in a world that seems to feature instant everything: instant rewards, instant food, same day delivery, the list goes on and on.

Yakov Smirnoff made the point really well. He is a Russian comedian – I wonder whatever happened to him?

He said he wasn't prepared for the unbelievable variety of instant products available in American grocery stores. He said, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder... -- "What a country!" he says.

But Western Society isn't nearly as amazing for people who have to deal with everyday life. As a result of our "instant gratification" mindset, we see the world changing around us at a faster and faster pace.

We wait for the movie to come out instead of reading the book.

Or we download it from Netflix while it's still in theatres!

Commercials on TV used to be 30+ seconds. Now they're more like 5-10.

Teenagers – and more and more adults too -- now prefer "Messaging" over texting and phone conversations. "iMessaging" – instant messaging that's supposed to be even faster than texting. Why? On the phone you can only talk to one or two persons at a time, but now, we can actually be in conversation with as many people as you have in your contacts, all at once!

It used to be that the MTV Generation was seen to be developing shorter and shorter attention spans – they became used to seeing shorter and shorter commercials, shorter and shorter news breaks. Music videos flash from scene to scene to scene – each image only lasting a second or less!

Even the last couple of Presidential elections have been focused on soundbites and video clips instead of real speeches or in-depth interviews to find out what the candidate really thinks.

At the workplace: if you break a record in sales, or production last month, your boss is likely to say, "that was great for last month, now this month you need to top it to get that bonus."

Or worse: your company isn't keeping up with the competition and needs to merge or sell out and things are about to change for you – and not for the better mind you!

Even some churches are getting caught up in the production frenzy of the world: you have to grow, you have to have more than one worship service, you have to expand and offer more and better ministries than the other churches. Starbucks in the lobby, multiple projection screens -- a live band! I've seen churches that decided to livestream the pastor's sermon to their "satellite" churches because he can't be at all the services at once.

I wonder sometimes about my own sermons. People are used to such stimulation and instant gratification, how do you endure 15-20 minutes of preaching? People probably think, "talk faster, do cartwheels, show me a movie clip, do something! How many of you have checked your watch at least once during worship today already?"

It's no wonder that people are in such a state. They're always living in anxiety and stress. The demands on us to perform, to adapt, to "get more results" are wearing us down.

One of the wonderful things about church is that we can enjoy it as a sanctuary from a world gone crazy with constant production and instant everything! We can come to worship and find rest and peace. We can shake off the stress and craziness of the week. Church can be your rock of peace and an anchor in the turbulence of a changing world.

But this morning I come to church and what do we get? Jesus talking about 'bearing much fruit.' Is it any wonder I find that just a little irritating?

But hold on a second – relax! Maybe we should be a little more trusting in God's word. Maybe there is more in this text than initially meets the eye. I mean there usually is, right? What does Jesus really mean by 'bearing much fruit?' How does he say I can get to a point of bearing much fruit?

According to the George Beasley-Murry commentary, something we should notice about Jesus' words is that there's a difference between work and fruit. A machine does work; only life bears fruit. "Work implies effort and labor; the essential idea of fruit is that it is the silent, natural, restful produce of our inner life."

So when Jesus talks about fruit he doesn't mean performance? He doesn't mean producing, producing, producing? When Jesus talks about fruit, he is not talking about the gardener performing duties, but rather the plant that is being tended.

As Murray continued: "The gardener may labor to give his apple tree the digging and manuring (apparently Murray thinks 'manure' is a verb), the watering and the pruning it needs; he can do nothing to produce the apple: The tree bears its own fruit."

Fruit grows naturally, the branch doesn't do anything to produce the fruit; it's genetically predetermined to bear fruit when it remains connected to the tree or vine and gets the necessary nutrients.

When Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" he didn't say to us: you must be successful, he said: be fruitful!

According to professor, writer, and priest Henri Nouwen, in a sermon on this very passage, Jesus makes a distinction between doing and being. Nouwen says: "Success comes from doing, and fruitfulness comes from being." Being in and with God, with others and with ourselves.

So Jesus is not saying, "Do more!" He is saying, "Be more!" Be all that you can be as you remain in me! Spend time with God, get to know God deeper. Let God love you. Experience God's inner peace once again, and his joy. Take a break from the world and be with God. Be with yourself too; get in touch with your inner self and your calling, and become centered in your inner spiritual life.

Don't worry about the fruit. Don't worry about success. Your fruit is spiritually predetermined when you remain in Jesus. It's a given. The fruit will grow naturally out of your life of centeredness and peace and love, just as the grape grows naturally out of the vine.

It's said that German Reformer Martin Luther, when he had a particularly busy day of work ahead of him, would schedule extra time for reflection and prayer in the morning, and then could be more effective in his work. That sounds like a pretty good deal to me. Take a longer break to reflect and recharge spiritually, and get done faster with your work as a result.

Steven Covey, in his *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, used the example of the lumberjack who takes frequent time-outs to rest and to sharpen his ax; as a result he cuts down more trees than any of his colleagues who are working themselves to death in a frenzy of chopping.

The Greek, *meno*, is the word translated as 'abide' and it can also mean to tarry, not to depart, to wait for, to continue to be present, or to remain as one - not to become another or different.

Abiding in Jesus means taking a break from the crazy world

Abiding in Jesus means restoring inner peace, finding spiritual refreshment

Abiding in Jesus means being assured of his love for us, so we can love others

Abiding in Jesus means that you don't have to be the engine -- He is!

Abiding in Jesus means that fruit is a given! You cannot help but be fruitful!

I think what it takes for us is to go to the bookstore and get some worship or meditation music, or an inspirational book; maybe we need to start a spiritual journal; or maybe we need to just drop a few things in our busy lives and make more time for sharpening our ax.

Contrary to my first impression of this text, Jesus doesn't call us to do more. He calls us to do . . . less! Jesus invites us to take a break. Take a break from the business of life. Take a break from performing. He wants us to be. Just... be. Truly be. Bearing fruit is about being in God; being loved, being centered.

Abide in God. Rest, and take time sharpen your ax. Amen.

### **Gospel Reflection**

*Remain in me as I remain in you.*

Lord of the  
one true

Vine,

in you we

live and move

and have our being.

We are your branches,  
spindly and slight and fragile.

Prune us

(though gently).

We want to bear more  
of your fruit.