

Sunday 23rd January, 2022

Theme: "I AM THE TRUE VINE"

Bible Reading: John 15:1-17

I am sure this is one of the easiest I AM statements for us to relate to. Living near the Beautiful Yarra Valley most of us have seen hectares of grapevines at various seasons. We have seen branches covered with brilliant green leaves and huge bunches of grapes ready for ripening. Yet we have also seen the stark reality in the off season of empty branches, cut back to point that they appear as though they can never produce again fruit again.

We had the opportunity to visit Margaret River in WA several years back and we toured several of the beautifully presented vineyards, it made this passage come alive.

Jesus and his disciples would have seen many grapevines on their walking tours around Galilee. They saw the care vine growers gave to their vines by enriching the soil and pruning the dead branches. They all would have enjoyed the fruit of those vines in their shared cup at special meals.

In today's passage, Jesus is hours away from his death. He is having an intimate conversation with his closest friends, the twelve disciples. Through this conversation Jesus paints a picture of a vine with branches that bear fruit. Jesus is the vine, we are branches, and God is the gardener. There is this beautiful and interconnected relationship in this analogy that God desires for us to realize. Through this analogy we are charged to remain in Jesus and see that our main purpose is to bear fruit. This morning we take some time to ponder who Jesus is, and who we are in the context of this vital relationship between the vine and the branches.

Let me ask you: "What stood out to you this morning as Grant read this amazing scripture"? Well, I'm going to share with you three things that stood out to me as a reread this passage as I prepared for today:

1. *"I am the true vine" v1*

First, I noted how this echoes those sayings that we have seen earlier, where Jesus is the bread of life or the light of the world or the good shepherd. However, this organic relationship between branches, vine, and vine grower is specifically non-hierarchical. It expresses intimacy and mutual dependence, so that all three are necessary to attain the goal of producing fruit. In fact, it is the *fruit* that others will be looking for!

2. *"I have called you friends" v14-15*

Then I noticed how in v12-17, Jesus uses His illustration of connectedness and intimacy to talk about relationships among his followers. Yes, He has been their example throughout their training in discipleship, but from now on, the love that he has shown to them is the same love they must share with each other.

This love is also non-hierarchical. No longer are the disciples considered servants to their master. They are now "friends" v15, who are privy to everything Jesus has learned from His Father. But Jesus still retains one command—that His friends love each other as He has loved them. Who can find fault with that?

It all sounds warm and cosy, but then I start thinking about Christians who are not lovable. Two colleagues team-teaching a class together start irritating each other. A self-centred 86-year-old treats their home health-care worker as her personal slave. A friend reports being constantly put down by her roommate on an overseas short-term mission's trip. In fact, often in churches there are one or two people who deliberately avoid each other and refuse to have meaningful conversation.

Agape love, of course, does not have to mean *liking* another person—it is wanting the best for them as you want the best for yourself. It is taking others on their own terms and accepting them the way they are, understanding that hurtful behaviour can come from personal insecurity or even mental illness.

It may sometimes mean confrontation and “tough love” that can easily be misinterpreted. Agape love demands a lot of humility. It is not surprising that Jesus called this kind of loving a “command” v17 because it is something you *do* rather than something you necessarily *feel*.

3. *“If you remain/abide in me and I in you, you, you will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing” v5*

I believe John 15 is meant to slow us all down and be more focused on Jesus and His word. Often our minds are frenetic, our hearts are so busy, and our inner world is dominated by the urgent and toward nothing specific.

To abide is to linger to remain. It's the idea of staying put. But you might say, I don't have time for that. I have things to get done. Besides, what Jesus is calling us into in John 15 opposes all that Jesus has given us to do everywhere else, right?

Wrong. Jesus invokes this word "abide" 10 times in 10 verses. And 6 times, he directly connects it to bearing fruit. It's painstakingly repetitive. Jesus is not telling us not to care about productivity or meaningful impact on those around us. Jesus cares a lot about those things. So, this is no rebuke for misguided ambition. This is a corrective to our misguided strategies.

Apart from our lived union with Jesus, moment by moment, day by day, we will have no enduring impact. But if we will just anchor ourselves in him; if we will prayerfully, consciously, deliberately depend on Him by faith, and open ourselves to Him by the admitted need of His Spirit; if we will make communion with Jesus our priority, then meaningful impact is inevitable.

Four Benefits or Blessings of remaining in Jesus.

1. Answered prayer

Look at v7. *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

2. God glorified

Look at v8. *“This is to my father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”* It is a tremendous blessing to think that sinful broken people like ourselves, get to display the wonders and power and goodness and glory of the Gardener.

3. Complete Joy

Look at v11 together. *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* This God-given joy strengthens us to get through tough times. Since this joy is not based on circumstance. It is not based on our accomplishments. It comes from our true vine Jesus. It is a supernaturally given blessing from the Lord: a deep and full joy that satisfies our soul no matter what we are going through.

4. Friendship

The fourth and final fruit/benefit Jesus mentions is friendship with Him. There are many things that make someone a friend, but one thing about a good friend is that they are allowed into your inner thoughts and life. You trust them and are vulnerable to them. Jesus calls us his friend because He shares what He learns from God with us. Let's read v15 together. *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”* Brothers and sisters, we can't labour effectively in our own strength to bear fruit for Jesus. Abiding in Christ continually is the strategy Jesus lays out for His followers to love each other radically. Let's Pray.