

Sunday 24th May 2020

The True Vine

John 15: 1-17

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Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener; he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing".

I do not think that there is any better image of the Christian life and of what is supposed to be like than this.

I want to dwell on this image today and on the promise that is made with it, the promise that says: "If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit".

I find this image of what it means to be a Christian tremendously reassuring.

There is so much love in these words for people who are tired out from all their work or discouraged by the fact that they do not feel they are good enough for God or that they have not done enough for God.

The image of Jesus as the vine and ourselves as branches reminds us that all good things that we experience and produce come not because of what we do, but because of what we are and where we are.

An avid gardener told me one time about a cucumber plot he had planted. He had been very careful to select the best seeds, and plant each one at its proper depth. He fertilized and watered the plants, he worked the soil faithfully each week to prevent weeds from encroaching and he sprayed to prevent bugs and blights from afflicting the young plants.

The season was a good one - just the right amount of rain and sunshine, and on the vines appeared broad green leaves and in due course the blooms. It looked magnificent!

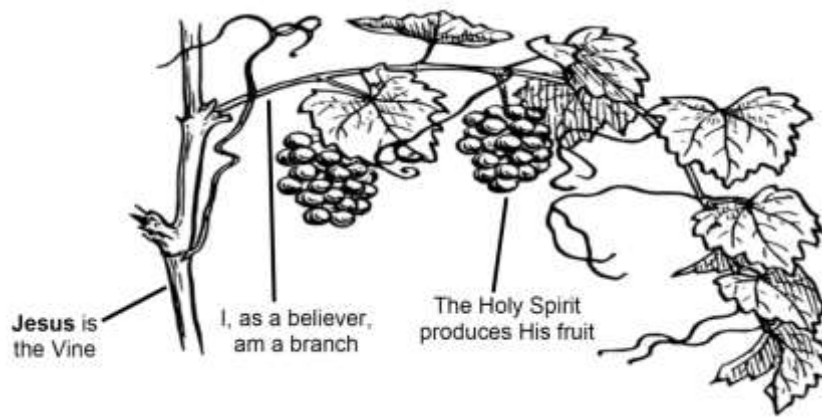
One day he noticed that here and there certain leaves were dying, certain blooms fading. Most of the leaves remained a healthy glossy green, but scattered among them were those turning brown. Why, he wondered, would some die in the midst of all the living? So he investigated.

Stepping carefully among the tangled mass of vines he traced the ones on which the leaves and blooms were dying, until he found that they were all connected to a single stem. There, just above the ground, something had severed the stalk. The entire vine above that point was dying because it was no longer attached to the roots and the stem that had produced it.

It is a common tale - but it is an instructive one.



It reminds us that we die spiritually, that we are incapable of producing fruit, when we are not attached to the vine or when we are not connected to the roots which nourish us. It also reminds us that when we are attached, the fruit that we produce, indeed the prosperity of the land itself, comes to us naturally, as a gift of God.



The gardener does the work and the vine he plants carries the sap and all its nutrition to us, and we, because we are in the right place, prosper and produce for the world, the fruit that it needs.

All of us want to do good things. We want to produce good fruit, but many of us, in trying to do good things, as I

said last week, end up feeling burned out, exhausted and even despairing.

This particularly happens to many people in the so-called caring professions - doctors, social workers, nurses, and the like.

They do much good - but many get frustrated, angry, and tired. Their ability to help others decreases, and some end up giving up entirely on their professions.

Yet there are others, others who do as much if not more, others who are full of hope and of life, full of care and love for their neighbours and their world, who never fall prey to this plague, but rather go and on, touching and healing those around them by what they do.

I believe it is because they are connected to the source of hope, to the source of life, to the source of care and love, for their neighbours and their world.

There are many people I meet who tell me when they find out I am a minister, that they don't go to church but they are Christians. After all, they say, "there's no real need to attend church to be a good Christian is there"?

When Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and you are branches", he also said, "no branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine".

Clearly there is a profound truth in this statement, and in the end it is **the overriding reason why we come to church, because it is here, planted in the community of our church that we know God best, and God knows us best!**

