

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 28th April 2024. The True Vine.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.

Call to Worship. 1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.



STF 479

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Prayers of adoration and confession

Lord when we think about how loved we are, we are humbled. We delight in every expression of human love and kindness that we receive. However we are overwhelmed when we begin to think of how much you, our Heavenly Father love us and keep us in your loving care. We bring you our thanks and praise.

Forgive us for those times when we forget about your love. When we are slow in gratitude and too hasty in words and deeds that do not reflect your love. Renew us and refresh us with your forgiveness that we might strive to be more like you and the people who reflect your graciousness. **Amen**

John 15:1-8. The Vine and the Branches

"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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Reflection

Let me ask you a question, what is your favourite fruit? I guess few of you if any, will say the Durian fruit!

I have seen it on my overseas travels and I know it is banned from being taken into many public places, like hotels for example. In short it stinks! I am told it tastes great and has incredible health giving benefits. I once got a small piece close enough to my mouth, but the disgusting smell turned my stomach and it was soon discarded.



Grapes 🍇 are my go to favourite. Easily available all year round. The grape has some lovely images associated with it. They are given to the sick as a comfort by kindly visitors, who might just eat them themselves if you don't watch them! Since they were first cultivated and mostly made into wine, grapes have been granted many symbolic meanings, from power and divinity to life and health, hospitality, sacrifice, celebration and indulgence. In Spain it's a new year tradition to eat twelve grapes to bring in the new year, in the hope of prosperity for each month of the new year.

So I warm to the gospel reading today. Jesus is The True Vine. Not just the fruit, but the one who brings forth fruit beyond our wildest dreams. He is the True Vine. The vine that stands for true prosperity in God's kingdom.

So why, True? Don't you just hate it when you buy sweet seedless grapes and then they turn out to be sour or have the odd cheeky pip! Jesus is what he says he is The True Vine. No disappointments, or substitutions. But in saying He is not just a vine but, The True Vine we need to dig deeper into the meaning of this.

I once read a poem in a gardening book online about growing vines. This is how the poem read, "First they sleep, then they creep, and then they leap." The poem was teaching that in the natural world growing a lush vine will take three years. The first year the vine doesn't appear to be doing anything, but below the surface the roots are starting to spread out. This is the sleeping phase. The second year the vine is in the ground it starts to creep just a little bit. But, what happens in the third year of cultivation? Abundant growth follows in just three years.

That's fascinating when we think about Jesus' three short but very full years of active ministry which led to his sacrificial death so that we might have life in all its abundance.

However what does Jesus calling himself the true vine in John 15 imply? It implies there are false vines, counterfeit sources of energy and strength that we might seek to empower us to bear fruit. But, these bogus sources will ultimately prove worthless. Only Jesus offers life with God. And, only life with God produces fruit that will last.

I have dabbled with growing vine like produce over the years and it is tempting to let the branches grow wild thinking that you will get a bumper crop. A much wiser gardening neighbour pointed out how that is so counterproductive and will just drain the life out of the fruit bearing branches. So those abundant tendrils are in a way, false branches that will not benefit the vine or bear good fruit. In some respects they represent greed, or laziness in good husbandry.

Why did Jesus choose the vine as a metaphor to describe our relationship with him and not another image? For example, why not figs? The grape does feature in 33 places in the bible however the fig tree also features sixteen times. The saying "every man under his vine and under his fig tree" depicts an era of peace and security in the past and the vision of an ideal future I Kings 5:5; Micah 4:4.

Or why not choose a tree that is lofty and powerful like the Cedar tree. Ezekiel 31:3 "Behold, I will liken you to a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches and forest shade".

The vine portrait of Christ perfectly illustrates the dependance we need to place in Jesus if we want to bear fruit. We might ask why didn't he choose a tree? Ezekiel 15 seems to address this very question, and Ezekiel even uses some of the same words and phrasing found in John 15. .

"And the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people make a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred is it useful for anything? Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred can it ever be used for anything! Therefore thus says the Lord God; Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Ezekiel 15:1-6

When we think about Jesus as the true vine, it is like an Old Testament picture that is first foreshadowed in Numbers 13. Spies are sent to scout out the Promise Land that God was giving to Israel. The single cluster of grapes they brought back to Moses was so enormous that it took two men to carry it on a pole. I have tried to include some pictures of gigantic grapes that grow in the Holy land. Can you imagine that! Wow peel me one of those grapes please! This gigantic cluster however is a prophetic picture of Jesus' message from John 15. Abiding in Jesus yields a fruitful abundant harvest.



This beautiful inheritance that God desired for Israel was a land flowing with milk and honey. He wanted to bless them with fruitfulness and would provide everything they needed so they could conquer and prosper there. But, God would not force them to accept his plan. We see that instead of trusting in God's dream, Israel listened to the many voices of fear. Remember the Golden Calf created and worshipped whilst Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments. Israel was God's chosen vine. We know that the vine was the symbol on the currency used in the time of the Old Testament. Also during the time of Christ, Herod's Temple had a tremendous vine on it overlaid with gold. Israel had always been depicted as God's vine, but it had become unproductive, so a new vine was established. The true Vine Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true vine and we abiding in Him are the branches. And yet the actual vine wood is weak and feeble. It lasts until its purpose is fulfilled and the fruit is harvested then the wood is destroyed. When I have grown vine produce at the end of the fruit season you usually let the branches die back and then prune them from the main stem, which you know will perform its miracle in the next season and from new growth next years crop will come. The vine metaphor was carefully chosen because vine wood by itself is not useful. Maybe we can make a spindly basket or a decorative wreath from vine twigs, but we don't make a table, or a bed. We certainly don't build houses that would protect us from the elements or an encroaching enemy. Jesus is emphasising with this vine portrait how our strength must flow from him. We can do nothing of lasting worth in our own power.

Sap also flows through the vine, into the branches, so they will have the energy they need to make flowers and eventually produce fruit. In the natural world, fruit production is an exhausting experience for a plant and the conditions have to be just right. Every plant has seasons when it grows fruit and seasons when it is storing nutrients, so it can bear fruit again. Nothing blooms continually. In the same way no one is constantly bearing spiritual fruit. Most importantly from John 15, we see fruit will never grow on a severed branch, and dead branches have one purpose, to provide fuel for a fire.

A question to consider as we conclude. If you could picture yourself as a fruit in God's hands what would you be? One of my friends has particularly this year, kept Ramadan, because of the troubles around the world and especially in Gaza. Each day the fast is broken as the sun goes down by eating three dates and saying a prayer, preferably with friends and family. I like that idea of sharing fruit and prayers with others. Especially after spending a day in prayer and fasting with thoughts and prayers for the ending of the troubles in our world. Dates have various meanings the fruit and a certain moments in time. So maybe if not a grape a date might be a fruit to aspire too? Giving sustenance and time for the needs of others. Remember Jesus said 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.' May we seek to be fruit that will be glorifying to God. Taking our strength from being connected to the True Vine.

STF 410

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place -
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within:

light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.



Prayers of Intercession or puzzling together over the needs we want to bring to God in Prayer.

I came across this idea of jigsaw prayer and thought it was an interesting concept. **Let us pray**

Choose one of the four coloured jigsaw pieces from the picture above. Keep it in your mind and pray for yourself.
Ask God to help you. Thank him for the good things in your life. Ask him to help you see the big picture of the plan he has for your life.

Look at the parts of your piece that reach outwards (the 'tabs').
Pray for people who reach out and help and show love to others. Thank God for the people who help and show love to you.

Look at the parts of your piece that have hollows waiting to be filled.
Pray for people who have lost something or someone or who feel that they have something missing in their lives. Ask God to help them to know that they are loved by him.

Try to think if your piece will fit into this piece? (it probably won't fit!)



Pray for people who find it hard to fit in, people who have moved to a new place, people who feel they have no friends, people who are forced to live in difficult situations. Pray that they will find peace, support and happiness.

Hold your piece in your mind and think of someone from your community, your friends or family that you would like to pray for. Thank God for that person and ask God to bless and help them.

Lord you told us that you are the vine we are the branches help us to connect with you and to bring that joyous connection to all those we are connected to.

We connect to together as we say **the Lord's Prayer**.

STF 550

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think, or speak, or do.

The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance see,
and labour on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.

Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day;

For thee delightfully employ
whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.

The Blessing...based on STF 258

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Vine,
we are the branches, keep us abiding in you.
May we grow in your love, and go forth in your name,
that the world might know that you have power to heal and to save.
Amen.

