

WEEKLY SERMON

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True Vine

Acts 8.26-40; John 15.1-8

Have you ever tried growing a grapevine? I used to have one in my garden in Walsall, and I can tell you it was hard work to persuade it to produce grapes. Vines have a mind of their own, and unless you prune them very carefully and feed and nurture them you will get no fruit, only leaves. I never gave my vine much time, and the grapes were microscopic!

Isn't it interesting that Jesus describes himself as the True Vine, and his followers as the branches? He goes on to say that it is the Father's will that we abide in Jesus and bear much fruit for him. It's a lovely image on the one hand, because the vine is all branches – Jesus didn't say 'I am the trunk and you are the twigs'.

But it's also quite a disturbing image, as I expect all of us are a bit like grapevines, in that we tend to have a mind of our own and throw up lots of useless activity and leaves, and possibly not much lasting fruit. It is also disturbing because Jesus says that like a vine we need to be pruned and cut back, so that we can be more fruitful. I don't know what it feels like for a vine to be pruned with secateurs, but I imagine it is very painful.

So what is the fruit that the Father wants us to produce in our lives?

Galatians 5.22 teaches us that 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'

Each one of these qualities is a characteristic of Jesus – Jesus is love, so if we want to be more loving, we need more of Jesus in our lives. If we want more of Jesus in our lives, in order to be more fruitful, then we need to spend more time with him, which is why he challenges us to abide in the vine, to spend time being nourished by Jesus each day. We are nourished by Jesus by receiving the sacrament on Sundays, but we need to be fed daily as well as weekly, and that is why a daily personal habit of reading the Bible and prayer is so important for our spiritual growth.

Perhaps you are one of those who have found Bishop Julian's Lent devotional, Read, Mark, Learn so helpful in setting time aside each day to abide in Christ. If so, what might you do next to maintain this habit in the weeks ahead?

Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn

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