

'I Am the True Vine'

John 15 v 1-17

Context:

The season of Lent has arrived and we begin the long period of preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Lent is a precious gift through which we are offered a focused time to reflect on our life and faith, and to allow God to make any changes necessary to transform us a little bit more into the perfect image of Jesus. In John's Gospel Jesus utters seven significant sayings about himself each beginning with the words: 'I AM'. Of course, to Jewish people those words were understood to signify the personal name of God himself, which He revealed to Moses in the wilderness (Exodus 3 v 13-15)– 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah'. In using these words Jesus was deliberately referring to himself as God, and having already declared: 'I AM the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life, Jesus concludes these seven 'I AM' sayings in John 15 by referring to himself as the True Vine. It is the eve of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion and he is sharing the last supper with his disciples (which started back in chapter 13) and here he appeals to them to stay connected to him in order to show themselves to truly be his disciples. He uses an agricultural image which was very familiar to people in his day, but also had significant connections to the Old Testament. It is a powerful image for to reflect on as we enter this time of Lent. So, let's dive in.

Observation:

1. Who is Jesus and who is the Father in v 1?
2. What two things does the Father do in v 2?
3. Why are the disciples already clean (v 3)? [NOTE The word for 'clean' in v 3 can also be translated 'prune' – as in v 2]
4. How does a vine branch bear fruit and how do the disciples bear fruit (v 4-5)?
5. What happens to branches/people that do not remain connected to the vine/Jesus (v 6)?
6. How does Jesus say we remain connected to him and what will be the result if we do (v 7)?
7. What will be the triple result of these answered prayers (v 8)?
8. With what standard or quality of love does Jesus love us (v 9)?
9. How do we show that we are remaining in his love (v 10)?
10. Why has Jesus told them (and us) these things (v 11)?
11. What is Jesus' primary command to us and what is the standard (v 12-13, see also v 17)?
12. Why can Jesus call his disciples '*friends*' rather than '*servants*' (v 15) and how do we show that we really are his friends (v 14)?
13. What amazing things does Jesus tell them in v 16?

Meaning:

1. Read Psalm 80 v 8-19 and Hosea 10 v 1-2. How do these verses help us understand what Jesus means when he says: 'I Am the True Vine'?
2. Bearing good fruit that will last means obeying the commands of Jesus. What is the main flavour of this fruit, i.e. what is the primary command of Jesus, what is the fruit we bear? - (see v 12-13 & 16-17).
3. How does bearing this specific fruit prove that we are Jesus' disciples (v 8)?
4. Staying connected to Jesus is the key to being able to bear this fruit. What is the specific way Jesus tells us we remain in him and he in us (v 7a)?
5. How do the *words* of Jesus remain in us and enable us to stay connected to Jesus and bear good fruit?
6. Jesus says he prunes (literally 'cleans') *fruitful* branches and, again, he does it through his word (v 2b-3). So, how does this work – how does Jesus prune/clean us through His word in the Bible?
7. What does Jesus tell us will happen to people who do not bear his fruit/obey his commands/stay connected to him (v 2a & 6)? What does this mean? (see Matthew 3:7-12 for more clues).
8. Is Jesus telling us that he will give us *literally* anything we ask for (v 7 & 16b)? How do the contexts of these two verses help us understand what Jesus *actually* means?
9. What is it like to have the joy of Jesus in you (v 11)?
10. What does it mean to be a *friend* of Jesus rather than a *servant* (v 15)?

Application:

1. What does bearing the fruit of sacrificial love actually look like in practice? When have you shown this quality of love to others and when has it been shown to you?
2. What is your practice of Bible reading? What level of importance do you give it in your life? How can you improve/develop it so that it produces even more fruit in you?
3. What does it feel like to be pruned/cleaned by Jesus through his word and what is the result? Can you give any examples from your own life?
4. How should knowing the ultimate fate of those who reject Jesus spur us on to love them, pray for them and share Jesus with them?
5. What is the normal content of our prayer life? Do we pray enough for God to empower us to bear good fruit, specifically the fruit of sacrificial love or is our focus too much on other things when we pray?
6. How can I experience more of Jesus' joy in my life?
7. How can I enjoy my relationship as a friend of Jesus without losing my reverence and respect for him as a servant?

Pray:

- For a greater hunger to read the Bible.
- For God's enabling power to love as Jesus loves.
- For those who reject Jesus, that they may repent and come to know him.