

# **Sermon on Sunday 2 May 2021**

**by Rev. Wendy Sellers**

*Readings: Acts 8. 26-end & John 15. 1-8*

I'm very fond of grapes, particularly when they are consumed as either sultanas or champagne. But I know nothing about growing vines. I am, however, about to learn.

My future vicarage has a walled back garden, which is excellent if, like us, you own a dog who is very good at escaping.

On the large south-facing back wall grows a fig tree and a vine. Both are very Biblical plants, perfect for a vicarage garden. So, I am going to have to learn how to look after them both, if I want a harvest.

I'm guessing that is going to involve watering and feeding. It will certainly involve pruning properly. It may well include protection from frost, as neither figs nor grapes are native to Hertfordshire. I shall find out.

I will talk to people who know better than me. I shall read up on it. I will use a bit of trial and error. If I'm really stuck, I'll email Bill. And sometimes I'll get a harvest and, chances are, sometimes I might not. I doubt I will ever produce sultanas or wine, but we may get to eat some ripe grapes if we are fortunate.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that he is the vine. His Father is the vine grower and we are the branches. The great thing about this analogy is that you need all three things. They are intertwined and interdependent.

You need a vine grower. Proper vines are not wild plants but cultivated ones. You need someone to plant the vine. To feed it and water it. To train it and prune it. You need the vine grower to pick the grapes and then use them to feed others.

You certainly also need a vine. To grow its roots deep into the soil to take up water and nutrients. To grow roots that will anchor it and help it weather the storms. You need the vine because it's the vine that does the growing and sustains the fruit.

Then you need the branches to form part of the vine. It's the branches that give forth both leaves and grapes. The leaves are, of course, how a plant feeds itself, using light. The seed of the fruit is how the plant reproduces itself.

This means that being a branch is an important job, and the Gospel reading warns us that not everyone will feel up to the task. As branches we will depend on both the vine grower and the vine itself. We are useless without either. But actually, the vine grower and the vine are depending on us, too. Without us the vine cannot increase. Without us our church will not grow, our faith will not grow, so that more and more people can know the love of God.

We are in a strange time at the moment, as we emerge into a new and uncertain future. Challenging yes, exciting yes, daunting yes and yes again. Some of the things we have done in the past have withered on the vine. Some parts of our church life will perhaps need pruning away, to let new things grow. Some unexpected branches may have sprouted and borne fruit we hadn't planned for. Raisins instead of sultanas perhaps, or grape juice instead of wine. Because what happens after we've done our part is seldom within our control, but is the responsibility of the vine grower. We do our small part, sustained by Jesus the vine and nurtured by God the Father, the grower.

Mission and ministry are the tasks of us all. We are all branches of the vine. I am not more 'branchy' than you because I wear a dog collar. It's not that you are a twig and the Bishop is a bough. You and I are no more or less likely to bear fruit than any other Christian. We are all equally dependent on the vine.

The works we do may produce visible fruit, but it may be we can never measure our impact on others. We just have to accept that: trusting the vine grower sees and knows all.

If we are to be good branches then we need to place our trust in Jesus, the vine and in God the Father, the vine grower. We need to play our part, putting our energy into growth and fruitfulness.

Over the next few months as a church, you will be considering your next steps. I say 'you', but of course I'll be doing the exact same thing but in a different church community. What needs pruning back or even cutting out? What needs feeding and nurturing? What is vulnerable to frost and needs protection?

The PCCs are already considering those things, and both have set up groups to think about mission and ministry in the near future. But remember that you are all the branches. You have an opinion and a voice. Please pray about what the church will look like over the coming months and years. Talk to a member of the PCC if you have a vision or a dream.

Then what part will you play in bringing those plans to fruition? I personally am always driven on by Matthew 9 verse 37: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few". This is the reason that once I'd heard the Good News I volunteered for numerous roles at church, I trained and ministered as a reader, I trained for ordination and it is the reason I now feel I must leave you. Because I am a branch and I trust the vine and love the vine grower.

The vine needs us, the branches. Jesus needs you and me.  
Amen

