

Online Sermon on Sunday 9 May 2021

by Rev. Bill Church

Gospel Reading: John 15. 8-17

Last Sunday, the Gospel was the parable of the vine and the branches, and Wendy reminded us that you have to have the grower and the vine and the branches for it all to work – the grower to tend and prune, the vine to nourish and the branches to flourish.

And the purpose is to bear fruit.

Years ago, we were looking for a house near Ipswich and viewed a cottage that had been restored, and very nicely restored, by an architect for himself. He proudly showed us a paved garden at the back, with a well-grown apple tree.

I asked, “What variety of apple?”

And he replied, “I don’t know – I just have it for the shape”.

That rather ended my interest.

The purpose of a fruit tree is to bear fruit.

A vine may look nice and may give shade, but its purpose is to bear fruit. Pruning is needed and branches must stay united with the vine, but that is the means not the end – the

end is to bear fruit – fruit, as Jesus said, to the glory of God and fruit that will last - fruit that will go on and on, fruit that will keep its goodness over time.

The fruit is to the glory of God, not to the glory of the branch; a branch that pushes itself forward with luxuriant foliage, but no grapes, may be pleased with itself but fails in its purpose and needs pruning.

And the fruit must last, not be a mayfly event, here today and gone tomorrow.

And what is that fruit?

I suppose the answer that first springs to mind is St Paul's list in Galatians of the harvest of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.

Yes, but the way John's gospel places this parable (and it is a parable, though not a 'story' parable) suggests the fruit he had in mind is just the first of those – love – from which all other virtues flow.

This chapter is part of the 'farewell discourses', where Jesus is speaking to his disciples during his last supper with them. Later that evening he would be arrested; and the next day he would be crucified.

When Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends," he was not just making a general observation, which centuries later will appear on many war memorials; he was making a very specific statement that he was going to lay down his life for them, and that he was doing this out of love for them; and that he expected them to love one another as he had loved them.

"This is my commandment – that you love one another." That commandment is easier to fulfil when we realise that we are all branching from the same vine – putting us all into a sort of brother and sister relationship.



The love that is channelled by the care of the grower, fed by the sap from the vine and powered by the sunshine of the Holy Spirit shining on the leaves on the branches, then ripens into all those virtues that Paul listed.

'Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine, and visit it with thine own ardour glowing.'