

## Wednesday reflection by David Kennedy

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed<sup>[b]</sup> by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become<sup>[c]</sup> my disciples. <sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

'I am the true vine', and you are the branches'.

*John 15. 1-11*

We know that so-called 'I am' sayings are a distinctive feature of St John's Gospel. We need to remember that the words 'I am' are of great significance. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses said to God 'What is your name'? And God replied, 'My name is I AM WHO I AM – Tell them, I AM has sent you'. So here, Jesus uses the divine name of himself – reflecting what John says right at the beginning - 'the Word was God'.

And there are a number of Old Testament passages where Israel is described as God's vineyard. Israel was meant to be fruitful, to be a blessing to the whole world. But so often, by deserting and forsaking God and falling into idolatry – well, instead of grapes there were briars; instead of fruit there was barrenness.

God the Father is the attentive and skilful vine-grower or gardener. Jesus is the vine. And we as Christians are the branches. And what are the branches for? Well, to bear grapes of course. And there is a real challenge in this passage. It is asking us a question – Are our lives fruitful for God? Because if the branches bear no fruit, then the skilful vine-grower really needs to remove them. But notice that if our lives *are* fruitful, the skilful gardener prunes those branches. Why? To make them even more fruitful. In other words, the skilful gardener gives attention to the grapes, to the harvest, the skilful gardener gives attention to *us*.

But you might ask, is all this automatic? Is this simply God's work and nothing much to do with us? Well, no metaphor is ever perfect or can cover all the bases. So our Gospel reading then introduces another image – the word 'abide' or dwell.

'Abide in me', says Jesus, 'as I abide in you'. This seems to be a two-way thing. As branches we are joined by faith to Christ who is the true vine. But there is something for us to do. And that is to seek to 'abide' in Christ. This teaching was given by Jesus at the Last Supper. Earlier that evening, Judas had gone out into the darkness to betray Jesus. If Judas was a branch, well, by doing, he'd cut himself off from the vine by leaving the company of Jesus. Instead of being fruitful as a disciple, he became barren.

And what happens to branches that are thus cut off – that depart from the source – well, they fade and wither – we throw them into the brown bin or toss them on the garden bonfire, because, sadly, there is no use for them.

So what does 'abiding in Jesus' mean? Well, we have some clues in the passage. Listen to what Jesus says, 'If you abide in me and *my words* abide in you'. So the first aspect of abiding is attending to Jesus' words, or obeying Jesus' teaching.

Further on in John 15, Jesus says this: 'If you abide in me and my words abide in you, *ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*' So here is the second way we abide in Christ – through prayer, through asking in Jesus' name. Asking in Jesus' name doesn't mean asking to win the National Lottery. It means asking those things that belong to Jesus' character, Jesus' values, Jesus' ethics. When we pray in Jesus' name, we seek those things that please him, that are about his desire to make our lives fruitful for God.

And a third element is also mentioned a little later in John 15 -we abide in Jesus when we give loving service to each other and to our neighbour, as Jesus' disciples. For in John 15, Jesus says once again, 'Love one another as I have loved you'.

Attending to Jesus' words;  
Praying in Jesus' name;  
Imitating Jesus in loving service.

That is what *abiding* in Jesus means. And if we do that, the skilful gardener and the true vine will bring forth in our lives, not only fruit, but more fruit, and much fruit.

Today, may we pray that we may be fruitful. It is why we are here this morning.