

The True Vine Easter Five 2021

Does anyone know how many “I Am” sayings of Jesus there are in John’s Gospel? The Bread of life, Light of the World, The Door, The Good Shepherd, The Resurrection and the Life, The Way the Truth and the Life and The True Vine.

These are all different ways that Jesus used to try to describe what He is to us, what He means to us if we believe in Him and choose to follow Him. And they are of course picture language, metaphors that He uses to help us think about and understand who He is.

Today we are thinking about what Jesus said about being The True Vine, and this was part of what is called His farewell discourse or talk. He was shortly going to be arrested and He was saying goodbye and trying to prepare the Disciples for what was coming.

So, He says that He is The True Vine, God the Father is the gardener, and we are the branches of the vine.

God the Gardener cares for us and looks after us and loves us, and he also wants us to bear lots of fruit. And we know what He means by fruit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Another way that we bear fruit is when we introduce other people to Jesus and they become followers as well and sometimes that happens very naturally just because we are loving and joyful and patient and kind and good and faithful and self-controlled, and sometimes we need to tell them about Jesus and invite them to become His follower as well.

Jesus promises that if we remain in Him, we will bear a lot of fruit, but if we don’t remain in Him, if we are apart from Him, then there will not be much that we can do for God.

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Here's an old joke, I am sure you all know the answer to. What is brown and sticky? That's right, a stick! So, if we break ourselves away from Jesus then we will become all dried up and useless, like a branch broken from a vine. It ends up as a stick.

What does it mean to remain in Jesus though? Well, it means that we belong to Him and He belongs to us. Like we belong to our families and sometimes to our friends, it is like we are part of them, and they are part of us. As Christians our bond with Jesus is even stronger because He sends His Holy Spirit to live in us with our Spirit, to help us and guide us.

Now we are going to have a bit of an agricultural look at this whole vine, branches, and fruit thing. Apologies to the farmers and gardeners amongst you, some of you will know some of this already, but it was all new to me!

I have some strange words for you. Firstly, Xylem and Phloem.

Pic 1

Xylem and Phloem are basically the plumbing system of a plant, like our veins and arteries in a way. Xylem is the name for the pipes which carry water and minerals up from the roots to the rest of the plant, especially the leaves.

Phloem is the name for the pipes which carry sugar around from where it is made in the plant and where it is used.

All the parts of a plant need water all the time. Sugar is a bit more complicated. It is made by the action of sunlight on the leaves, and it's used in various other parts of the plant and after the growing season, it's stored in the roots or tubers.

Pic 2

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So there is a system to get the good things, water, nutrients and sugar to where the plant needs it and the fruit needs lots of sugar to make it sweet to attract animals to eat it and spread the seeds around.

The phloem, which carries the sugar, isn't just single pipes though, it is an interconnected network that comes together in the trunk and there are crossover places between the pipes so the sugar can get to where it is needed.

So just like the branches of a vine can't receive water, nutrients, and sugar unless they are attached, we can't receive good things from God or contribute good things to his Kingdom unless we are connected. So, what are some of the ways we can stay connected to God?

Prayer, reading our bible, worshipping Him, meeting together.

Here is another unusual word, Phyloxera. Anyone know what a Phyloxera is?

Pic 3

It is an insect which infects vines, damages the leaves, and kills the plant.

Pic 4

But some vines are resistant to phylloxera so the vinegrower takes a piece of vine that is prone to be infested and grafts it into the vine that is resistant to the pests.

Pic 4

We are vulnerable to physical and spiritual pests – we call them sins, but Jesus is totally resistant to sin, so if we are grafted into Him, we can overcome sin as well by His strength and by becoming one with Him.

As I said, God wants us to bear lots of good fruit, and all gardeners know that if you want good fruit, you must prune the plant. That means cutting it back

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so that it doesn't waste its strength on too many branches and leaves. And there are things in our lives that need cutting back so that we can be stronger, more focussed and produce more fruit for God. It will be different for everyone, but we all have areas of our lives that distract us and if we allow them to overgrow then they will lead us away from God. You sometimes see overgrown plants that are all straggly and spindly, ugly, and not much use. So, we need to allow God, ask God even to cut back those things in our lives that are not helping us to grow in fruitful ways.

So, Jesus is the True vine, and we are grafted into Him which will help us to grow strong spiritually to produce good fruit and become more resistant to sin. God is the gardener who loves us and cares for us. We need to stay connected to Jesus and to each other, it is no good breaking away and trying to go it alone because we are all grafted into the same vine and together, we can receive all the good things that God has promised us, we can be fed and nurtured and together we can produce much more fruit for God's Kingdom.