

Sunday Update
2nd May 2021

John 15:1-8

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

How's your garden getting on? Do you have a garden and are you able to look after it, or do you have a man who comes to do the work for you? It has been a strange spring this year; we've had lots of sunshine and not very much rain; we've also had a whole succession of very cold, even frosty, nights so the little plants are still under cover! One of the garden tasks that we have to do from time to time is pruning; if we don't prune them, the plants will grow out of control. Pruning does two things: first of all, it cuts out any dead wood, and secondly, it cuts back some shoots so that others will be stronger and produce more fruit or more flowers. Maybe you don't have a garden and have no interest in gardening; you live in a flat and you're only connection with something green and growing is to have some house-plants. Well, this world of plants and gardens is the world in which we find ourselves today with our Bible passage.

Jesus says about Himself, *"I am the true vine"* (verse 1) This is the seventh and last of the "I am" sayings in John's gospel, when Jesus takes some pictures and ideas and compares Himself to them. The vine was a well-known image in Israel to describe Israel as God's people. In Isaiah chapter 5, the prophet speaks of God creating a vineyard: the ground is cleared, choicest vines are planted; it has a winepress and a watchtower. It has everything going for it. This is understood to be a picture of Israel as the people of God. The Temple in Jerusalem had a golden vine over its porch and in AD68-70, there were coins minted for Israel with the image of the vine on them. There are other places in the Bible where the same idea is used to describe the people of God, in both the Old Testament and the New; Jesus tells a couple of parables based on the vineyard as the people of God.

In Isaiah 5, we see God coming to His vineyard looking for fruit. *"Then He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit."* (Isaiah 5:2) The people failed to live up to their calling as God's people. In particular, they were called to be a light to the nations around about them, to share the grace of God and their faith with people of other nations, but they failed; they kept the grace of God and their faith completely to themselves. Not only that, they were called to be a holy people, a people who learned to be gracious and compassionate, to be good and to do what is right – again they failed to do that and injustice and corruption and wrong-doing were in the hearts of the people. God found "bad fruit" in the life of His people.

Jesus calls Himself *"the true vine."* Jesus is the One who takes up the mantle and the calling. He is going to be all that Israel was supposed to be but failed to be. Jesus will be the light of the whole world; He will be altogether good and live His life in right ways; He will serve God faithfully and well for all of His life. His disciples will carry that work on after Jesus has gone. The good fruit of Jesus' life is the quality of His character and the good work that He did; the good fruit of Jesus' life is the salvation

that He achieved for us; the good fruit of Jesus' life is the people who love and follow Him, who live by faith in Him and look to share the good news with others. This is what Jesus came to do and this is what is pictured in the notion of the "true vine".

The purpose of the vine is to bear fruit. You don't grow a vine for its looks; you grow the vine to grow grapes! Jesus talks about the Father as the gardener and the gardener has one task, to make the vine even more fruitful. He prunes. Leslie Newbigin describes pruning as a double task, to "clear off" and to "clear up". In other words, the gardener cuts out branches that are dead and no longer bear fruit at all, and then he cuts back some shoots so that the plant bears more good fruit. We honour God and bring glory to Him by bearing good fruit: good fruit is all about the kind of people we are, that we live good lives with good qualities, that we learn to be more and more like Jesus; good fruit is about sharing the grace of God with others and allowing others to discover something good about God. This good fruit in our lives gives honour and glory to God. God wants us to bear more and more good fruit, and for that fruit to be lasting fruit.

So often, this "pruning" work in our lives happens when we read the Bible or hear it preached. We read "*don't show favouritism*" (James 2:1) and when we take that to heart, we ask ourselves if there is anything we do that is shaped by prejudice and bias; if there is, then we "prune out" these bad attitudes to get rid of our prejudices and to treat everybody equally and fairly. We become better people in our relationships with others. Or we read "*humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.*" (James 4:10) What does it mean to be humble? Then we ask ourselves if we are humble people and what stops us from being humble? Is there some pride in our hearts? When we work through these questions in our minds, guided and prompted by the Spirit, then we change our attitudes, or the way we speak, or the way we behave, and we become better people.

Good fruit is about our character; we should be good people, looking to become more and more like Jesus. Good fruit is about sharing the good news of Jesus with someone else. This good fruit is produced in our lives by three things:

1. We remain connected to Jesus (we're going to think more about this in our Zoom service); we remain connected to Jesus by holding on to our faith come what may.
2. We pray: prayer is such an important way of remaining connected to Jesus and finding strength to be good people.
3. We love one another. It is Jesus who draws people to Himself, "but (He) is revealed when His people love one another." (Bruce Milne)

We don't always get this right; there are times when we make mistakes and get things wrong at times; our priorities are out of kilter and we run the risk of producing "bad fruit" in our lives as Israel did in the past. We are inspired by the good fruit we see in Jesus and then we work hard to produce good fruit in our lives, and then even more good fruit and good fruit that will last.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for Jesus, the true vine, the One who continues and completes the calling of Your Old Testament people, Israel. We thank You for His good life, for the good character we see in Him, for His love; we thank You for the good work that He did, especially achieving our salvation. We pray that You will help us to fulfil our calling, to be more and more like Jesus in our character, and to share the good news with someone else.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,*

*To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For ourselves, confessing our faults and failings, our weaknesses and shortcomings, ask God to help us be people more like Jesus; ask Him to help us stay strong in our faith; ask Him for the courage to share our faith with someone else this week.
- For people who are struggling with faith because it is being stretched almost to breaking-point; for people under pressure and stress, who are feeling their weakness more than their strength; for people who are considering giving up their faith altogether. Lord, be gracious.
- For the election campaign in Scotland, to be about values and what is important; let it not become a slanging match!
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace; for the process of grief that goes on and those who feel the effects of lockdown on their deepest emotions and feelings of loss.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For the opening-up of things after lockdown; more businesses opening on April 26th and travel becoming less restricted; all children have gone back to school full-time; continue to pray for safety and for good health for the population, that there will be no more spikes in the virus and that people will behave responsibly.
- For people who are still isolating, still spending time on their own again and feeling afraid; for people in care homes, beginning to meet family again, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils and teachers back full-time; for pupils to settle back down to a routine and to stay safe; for teachers who are trying to manage classes as well as teach and catch up with lost work.
- For communities and businesses: the pubs and hotels and others preparing to open again this week; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are still on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, some buildings open and some still closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

Rejoice the Lord is King	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh0BYrdd-8o
My Jesus, my Saviour	My Jesus, My Saviour - [Official Video Lyric] - YouTube
Before the throne of God above	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MUNywhsZPU
Seek ye first the kingdom of God	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo76XUt0tO4
Be Thou my vision	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxvXGgSlRcs

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - NEW ISSUES. The next issue of “**EVERY DAY WITH JESUS**” Booklet for May and June 2021 is now available. If you desire a copy please contact Ian Aitken.

Also, available is the next issue of the “**WORD FOR TODAY**” Booklet and “**WORD FOR YOU TODAY**” Booklet for Young People for May, June, and July 2021. If you desire a copy, please contact Michael Merriman.

Let the Bible feed you.

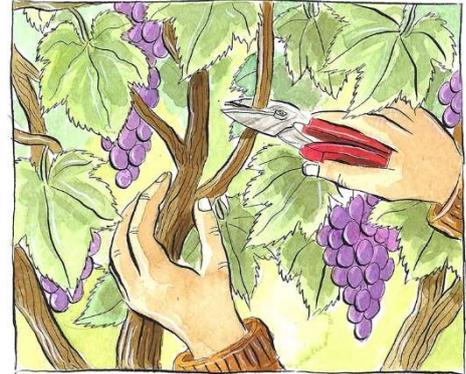
Communion – as part of our service this Sunday, we will celebrate communion together. Please bring some bread with you and some wine or juice or water, so that you can take part in the communion part of the service if you want to.

Stay connected

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Come apart from your busyness.
Leave your stresses at the door.
Come and reconnect with God.
Remain in him and grow.
Grow closer, grow deeper.
Grow and be fruitful.
Come and glorify God!
Amen.



Question...

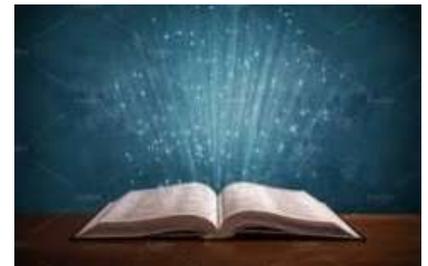


In what ways have you stayed connected to people throughout the pandemic?

Challenge...

Pick a fruit that is most like how you feel, for example a polished apple – bright, a lemon – sour/excited, a pineapple – prickly/grumpy.

What emotion might grapes represent?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in **John 15:1-8**. You can read them in a Bible or find them [here](#). Here's another version you could read:

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/22614/easter-5-present-the-reading.pdf>

Here's a short video you could watch too: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEiIEfThEjk>

Talk together...



- Have you ever planted or grown anything?
 - What does it feel like waiting for it to grow?
- What do you think it means to “remain in” Jesus?
- How have you stayed/how do you stay connected to God?
 - In what situations or surroundings do you feel most connected to God?
- What do you think the “fruit” is that Jesus talks about?
 - Look up Galatians 5:22-23 for ideas!
 - Can you see any of this ‘fruit’ in people you know?
- Spend some time connecting with God. Sit outside, hug a tree, listen to some worship music, read the Bible, write a prayer, watch the clouds, splash in water – whatever you want to do, just spend time with God, unhurriedly and quietly spend time in God’s presence and allowing him into yours.

Play together...

I heard it through the grapevine

Sit in a line or circle with plenty of space between each person. The first person whispers a phrase to the next person who then passes it on until it reaches the last person. The last person writes down or says what they heard – was it the same as the original whisper?

Obstacle course

Set up an obstacle course around your house or garden. Can you complete it while staying connected to each other?

Pray together...

You’ll need some grapes.
Each take a grape, say thank you to God for someone you are connected to, then eat the grape.
Finish by saying these words:
Thank you, God,
for all our relationships
and the ways we are connected,
and for our connection to you.
Amen.

Do something...

You will need: a glass of water, bright food colouring, a stick of celery or a white flower with a long stem.

Add a few drops of food colouring to the water and stir until the colour is all mixed in.

Place the celery/flower into the water.

Watch what happens during the day as the plant sucks up the water.

How might this be a symbol of us remaining in Jesus?



Praise together...

[Never once](#) by Matt Redman

[The more I seek you](#) by Kari Jobe

[The fruit of the Spirit song](#) A fun children’s song that reminds us of the true fruits of the Spirit!!