

Bible study on John 15.1-8

Begin with an opening prayer

We gather here, O Lord, for you, the vine, to nourish us.

May we, the branches, draw our strength from you,
and grow in harmony, unity and love.

May we find nourishment through our rootedness
in the life, teachings and love of Christ.

Receive the fruits of our worship and be glorified.

Amen.

Read the passage

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Jesus' parable of the true vine draws on Isaiah's song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5.1ff), where God's planting symbolises 'the house of Israel and the people of Judah'. In John's narrative, Jesus speaks these words before his death, but like everything he says in chapters 13–17, he has an eye on his later followers. John's audience hears what Jesus says as words of the crucified and risen Christ addressing their particular situation, where hostility poisoned relationships between the local synagogue and the Jesus community (John 16.1-2; cf 9.22, 15.18ff).

'I am the true vine' has the power to reframe this adversity. The world, represented by the local synagogue, may subject them to violence, but they are still God's true planting, the object of his tender care and love. The hostility they endure can only sharpen their sense of this. The language of 'abiding' first appears in John 1.32, where it is used of the Spirit 'remaining' (the Greek word is translated as 'abide', 'remain' or 'stay') on Jesus from his baptism onwards. And then two of the Baptist's more curious disciples 'remain' with Jesus for the day (1.39). So 'abiding' speaks of grace and relationship – the flow of the 'greater love' of the new commandment (John 13.34; 15.12-13) – sustaining disciples in adversity, like fruitful branches on

the vine. If the vine suffers loss because branches are pruned and then burned, this too lies within the vine-grower's remit to sustain its fruitfulness.

Like all parables, this one invites further reflection. In the face of all that threatens the vine, 'abiding in love' is whatever strengthens the flow of grace and relationships, without allowing the community to become defensive and turn in on itself. Fruitful vines benefit the world beyond the vineyard. Christ-like love can absorb and even redeem hostility.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

At various point during the coronavirus pandemic we have been encouraged, urged, and for a time required, to stay at home. How do we 'stay home' (abide, remain) with God? The purpose during the pandemic was, to quote the UK government's well repeated slogan, to 'protect the NHS' and 'save lives'. Jesus' aim is that we might grow and 'bear fruit', and he says this is not possible unless we remain connected with him and each other, like branches on a vine. During lockdown, people found new ways to stay connected to one another (e.g. by using technology in new ways). Churches found new ways to be and to worship together, new ways to 'stay home' with God. What have we learnt from those experiences that endures? Are there yet more new ways of connecting to explore?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



When might your feelings be portrayed like this?

In what situations do you feel most connected to God?

What can help you to remain in the right place to grow?

Prayer

I am the vine.

I am your origin, your nutrients, your mainstay.

Root yourself in me.

Let yourself be fed.

Let yourself grow...closer and deeper.

And in the growing, allow the pruning.

Allow me to prune, to trim, to cut away your broken branches,

your fruitless parts,

your strivings,

branches that are going to seed.

And watch and wait.

Wait for the new shoots.

Wait for the new fruits to bud slowly and open gently.

Turn to my warmth, and let your fruits open in my glory.

A prayer to end the Bible study

As we leave this place,

may we abide with God,

grafted and rooted and pruned.

Lord, help us to stay connected to one another and to you,

bearing fruit wherever your love takes us.

Amen.