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John 15:1-8.

Being Fruitful

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Jesus frequently teaches using word pictures from nature. Last week Gilly spoke of Jesus as the good shepherd caring for his flock. Today a vineyard. Father God as the chief gardener, Jesus as the vine and us as branches growing from the master plant. Sunshine and rain feed the vine and the gardener cares for the plants, pruning to remove the dead wood and make the healthy branches more fruitful. Jesus is saying we can't be fruitful in the way God intends, without staying close to Him, receiving from Him. This makes sense when we accept that all life is a gift from God.

We know that God's ways are not our ways. Kingdom values differ from our cultural norms. Perhaps being fruitful for God might look very different from how we imagine. Probably not to do with success or achievement.

Our reading includes this intriguing verse "Remain in me, as I also remain in you". Other versions use the word "abide", meaning stay, dwell or "make your home in". I like that, as we make our home in Jesus, He makes His home in us. This is the way our lives can be fruitful. Not just any old fruit but the best fruit! Fruit that will last, fruit of eternal value. Making our home in Jesus leads to flourishing. Becoming the person God created us to be. When he first thought of us before the beginning of the world.

Do you ever feel there's something missing? Something inside doesn't feel quite right? Our broken world impacts us all from birth. Much as our parents do their best they can't love us as unconditionally as God does. But being completely loved is what we are longing for so we adapt to our surroundings by unconsciously developing the personality traits we think are most likely to help us be as loved as possible. The Enneagram is a helpful tool to recognise these aspects of our character.

The spiritual journey is a life long journey of transformation. It's about following Jesus "more nearly and more dearly" as the prayer goes. Knowing God, responding to His love in service but it's also about recovering our true self and more fully making our home in Him. St Augustine famously said "Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee". We discover ourselves in discovering God.

The more we become the person God created us to be the more we can serve Him in the unique way He planned for us, feeling more at home in ourselves. In other words being fruitful! A natural response to staying close to Jesus.

But there is no new growth without loss. God's pruning can be painful and disappointing, door's closing, things not going the way we hope. But can we see these times as part of his love for us? Part of the universal pattern where death precedes resurrection

There is always more of God to be discovered both as an individual and as the church. We are part of something much bigger. We are the body of Christ working together to expand Christ's kingdom. How wonderfully fruitful that can be! It is such a joy when people say to us how welcoming, friendly and loving they find Holy Trinity Sunningdale. That sounds like evidence of fruit to me.

Our plans for transforming Trinity are all about wanting to build on the fruit that past generations have laid here. For our surroundings to be conducive to enable more people to taste and see the goodness of God. The richness and depth of lives lived connected to Jesus, the vine, our real home.