



Fifth Sunday after Easter

Sermon by Revd Matthew Wright



Sunday 2 May 2021

READINGS

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

The Vine and the branches.

Good morning Friends. Today's Gospel presents the familiar image of the vine and branches. John uses overtly theological images and metaphors to communicate some of the truth of his Gospel. Typically, we understand that, at a spiritual level, Jesus is the source of our sustenance and power. Like a battery which is not regularly connected to the main power source, we too, if not connected to Jesus, will soon be depleted. At another level though, frequently in the Old Testament, the image of the vine, or that of a vineyard, is used to refer to Israel. Jesus is therefore making a broad theological statement by saying, "I am the vine," for, at one level, he is implying that he is somehow standing in the place of Israel.

In this way, Jesus' use of the vine metaphor is not dissimilar to that of the Good Shepherd image where, traditionally *shepherd* was a metaphor for the rulers of Israel. So where, by saying he is the Good Shepherd, Jesus is comparing, and replacing himself with the then present Jewish rulers, so too, by saying he is the true vine, is Jesus saying that, in him is the true Israel. So that perhaps is the broader, Scriptural context of this passage. What about its application for us?

I think, the immediate application, as we have said is in some ways clear – by staying connected to Jesus we are spiritually fed and nourished. So let us ask then a more practical question – how does one stay connected to Jesus? Richard Rohr, and he is not alone in sharing these sentiments, has made the observation that one of the main features of modern society is its superficiality. What does he mean in saying this? He means, the most general level, that society suffers from the inability to delve deeply into anything. Overstimulation (that is a constant stimulation of the senses) causes people to flit from one thing to another motivated by the prospect of instant satisfaction and gratification. As soon as something ceases to gratify our immediate senses, we move on to the next thing with

the result that we only ever stay at the surface of things. While this might have other consequences, the net result for our spirituality can be that the interior life is often neglected.

One way we can stay connected to Jesus, the true vine, is by making a conscious effort to pause and quieten ourselves and our minds occasionally throughout the day. This is admittedly difficult, especially if we have demanding jobs and families to look after. But it can be as simple as pausing briefly, taking a few deep breaths, and emptying our mind of thoughts of the task at hand. If we can manage it, we can also dedicate a slightly longer period in the day where we do the same.

Another practical implication of us being connected to Jesus, the true vine, pertains to the communality or corporateness of this image. In other words, being connected to the vine means, and cannot happen apart from, being connected to a community of faith. The image of the vine, like that which Paul uses of the Body, is fundamentally corporate or communal in nature – being part of the vine means not just being connected to Jesus, but being connected to one another. Again, this has become increasingly difficult, especially in light of COVID, with many still unable to attend services. There is then a heightened onus on each of us to stay connected to our spiritual brothers and sisters using whichever means we can. In so doing, we will also stay connected to Jesus, the true vine. Amen.