



John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

JESUS – THE TRUE VINE

Scripture: Psalm 22:25-31 and John 15:1-8

In our first reading we hear David inviting and even compelling the whole community to join him in standing in awe of the Lord.

What event would call everyone together for such praise.

If you read the entire Psalm you will see that David had cried out to God in his affliction and God heard his cries and answered, thus deserves praise. Who is David inviting to praise God?

First, he invites brothers and sisters in his presence to join both future generations and those yet unborn, challenging our ideas of time and space. For he says – all the ends of the Earth, all the families of the nations, and all who sleep in the Earth are summoned to respond to God's greatness.

Even those "who go down to the dust" shall bow before God. I wonder if David is suggesting that those who have died have an opportunity to praise God? How do God and those who have died relate to one another?

In other words, all people, in all times and places will remember, turn to the Lord and repent, worship and bow down before Him and live for Him. David is really serious about the breadth and depth of the Lord's praiseworthiness.

So how does this Psalm link into our second reading from John's Gospel? It has to do with praise and gratitude and remaining connected to Jesus the true vine.

Our faith and ability to bear fruit for Jesus is an ongoing command. For God will remove all the branches that bear no fruit – all those who don't remain in God's word and who don't believe the Scriptures will be cut off. It is only when we remain connected to Jesus and serve Him that we will bear much fruit.

If you consider plants in your garden – sometimes they flourish and sometimes they wither and die. As Christians we experience times of highs and lows in our journey of faith. Sometimes, we remain too long in the lows because we have let our relationship with Jesus grow inactive.

Just like our plants – if we forget to feed and water them, they will die – if we forget to feed ourselves to remain fresh and vital, connected to Jesus, we also will die.

We may have begun our relationship with Jesus all excited and brimming with energy. However, if our connection to Jesus is loose, our enthusiasm wanes and our spiritual energy withers – like a drooping plant, our relationship with Christ that was once vibrant, fresh and exciting, becomes slow, stale, boring and dry.

Sometimes we fail to recognise or see it because we still appear to be doing ministry; saying the right words; singing the same songs – so there is an appearance of freshness on the outside, but this does not reflect what is happening on the inside. It is so important for us to stay connected to Jesus – the source of our Christian life.

It is easy to let the ways of the world get hold of us and drain our obedience and the fruit that obedience to Jesus produces. To remain vibrant and exciting and fresh in our relationship with Jesus we must remain connected to Him.

Every year Palestinian grape growers pruned their vines. They cut off the dead wood that had no life in them and trimmed the living branches so that the yield would be greater. Thus the people who first heard Jesus tell this story, knew exactly what He was talking about.

John's Gospel uses the word "remain" which is "meno" 11 times in this chapter, 40 times in his Gospel and 27 times in his 3 letters. So obviously it is very important to note.

There are many things that stop us from remaining in our relationship with Jesus. There are people today who are spiritually weak because they have too much comfort – they have been blessed with everything they need and more.

That happened with the people of Israel. Deut 8:11-14.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Regardless of how our lives are going, there is always something to be thankful for. There is always a reason to look to God and be happy because God blesses us.

How about the air we breathe; the fact that we have clothes to wear or a roof over our head or food to eat. Praise and gratitude to God needs to come direct from our heart.

Sometimes people have to become uncomfortable in order to break free from being held hostage with too much of everything. They may just turn to God when they are struggling but when things are going well – they turn away from Him. Sometimes we may be so busy we miss out on the things God is saying to us.

None of us can follow Jesus on our own terms. Jesus defined through His preaching, teaching and personal example what we need to do if we want to be His disciple.

Hebrews 6:7-8 tells us: when the ground soaks up the rain that falls on it and bears a good crop for the farmer it has the blessing of God. But if a field bears thistles and thorns, it is useless. The farmer will condemn that field and burn it.

Are you drinking in the rain that God is showering on you and enjoying the blessings that He has provided you, with a meaningful and exciting relationship with Him?

Or are you like a thirsty plant that is withering because you are just too comfortable and have forgotten who is providing the rain?

Are you so habitual that you have forgotten how to open yourself to become fruitful soil that produces good and helpful fruit?

Have you become so judgemental that the rain God provides simply runs off your back?

Have you become so lazy that your soul has turned to clay and water and can no longer feed the good fruit?

Is it possible that you have been so busy that the rain can't even touch you?

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right, but Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to Him. Apart from Christ our efforts bear no fruit.

God's two distinctive actions are:

Cutting the branches off – removing those who deny Him because if they remain, they will infect the rest of the tree. This happens when people try to block the efforts of God's followers with doubts and temptations, trying to undermine God's word and commands.

Cutting the branches back – this is pruning, or disciplining the fruitful people to promote growth and strengthen character and faith.

Remaining in Jesus, the True Vine means:

Believing that He is God's Son

Receiving Him as Saviour and Lord

Doing what God says

Continuing to believe the Good news and

Relating in love to the community of believers – Christ's body.

Prayers of Thankfulness

Heavenly Father, we gather in your Holy Presence, with hearts filled with joy and thankfulness, because of Your great goodness and mercy; Your generous ways fill us with awe and praise, because through these gracious actions of mercy, we are privileged to glimpse something of Your heart and being and yet we will never fully know You because Your Holy ways are totally unknowable.

Generation after generation of people have learned about You, through their experiences of Your ever-present grace, as it changed and enriched their lives; and generations yet unborn will also make this startling and amazing discovery, that You are a God to always be praised and thanked for the infinite love and care showered upon them - simply because they are Your own children, and Your heart overflows with love and mercy for them.

We give thanks to You God, because You lift our vision above ourselves to a wider understanding of Your love for all people. In the presence of others, who also make this same startling discovery, we learn more about You by realising that we are not the centre of the universe—and that Your love and mercy is poured out to all people from all lands, and in every circumstance of life.

We ask forgiveness for our limited understandings, and we seek Your blessing on us as we try to learn more about other people and their needs. Ever-generous God, we give thanks for Your goodness in our past and in our present life and circumstances – how great is our God! Amen.