

## **'I am the vine' (John 15:1-8)**

### **Intro**

So here we are, well through the 'I am' sayings' from John's gospel.

We began a few week back with 'Before Abraham was, 'I am'' and since then we've looked at four I am sayings. I am the way, I am the bread of life, I am the gate, I am the good shepherd

Still to go- I am the light of the world, I am the resurrection and the life. This morning – I am the vine

I'm sure that if you didn't know this already, you've picked it up over the last few weeks that John's gospel isn't much like the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John picks up particular themes and weaves them into the story of Jesus.

The 'I am' sayings of Jesus are great because they're so visual. If you like to think in pictures, this is fantastic. There are all kinds of different ways of grasping concepts. But even if you prefer a different way, then hopefully the image of the vine can be useful.

### **Like gardening?**

I'd like to conduct a quick poll this morning. Could we have a show of hands. Who likes gardening?

Who doesn't like gardening, but likes to enjoy the benefits of someone else's gardening!

Who doesn't care as long as its big enough to play football?

### **Everything you need to know!**

So some of you could probably stand here and tell us pretty much everything there is to know about vines and how to grow them successfully. Some of us haven't got a clue. But thanks to the internet I can provide the clueless with a what to do and what not to do of vines.

Vines like deep, well-drained soil, not too sandy, not too much clay, pH around 5/6 is perfect.

Trellis is important, giving the vine structure in its early years.

Vigorous pruning – cutting back two thirds of the growth.

Don't take any of the fruits for the first two years.

### **Two 'I ams'**

I am the vine. In the passage that was read to us we find that there are actually two 'I ams'. And no jokes about dog food today!! V1 I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. V5 I am the vine, you are the branches.

What's happening around this passage? Where does it fit in the gospel narrative? Cos although its thematic, John is still moving the story forward towards Jesus' death and resurrection. Here we're well through the story. The Passover meal has taken place and Judas has already gone. Jesus speaks to the remaining disciples. Following this he prays, then is arrested.

### **Israel gone wild**

So what do these two statements mean? Are they saying the same thing? Are they saying different things?

‘I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener.’

I’m sure that most of us associate vines with juicy grapes to pop in our mouths, or a rather nice bottle of wine to be enjoyed. We almost certainly don’t think of Israel. But that’s what the people hearing this gospel or reading it would have probably thought about when they came across the word ‘vine’. The vine was used throughout the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel. These chosen people (the nation of Israel) were God’s vineyard.

But you know, it is actually a negative image. Every time Israel is likened to a vine it’s speaking of degeneration. In Psalm 80 we learn that God had brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it in the promised land...., but then it was ravaged.

Isaiah said (ch 5) that the vineyard of God had borne grapes....., but they were wild grapes instead of proper ones. And Jeremiah (ch 2) said that God planted a choice vine....., but it had gone wild.

A vine that has run amok becomes pretty useless. There’s plenty of foliage but hardly any fruit, and what there is, is of poor quality. There are large amounts of woody branches, but unfortunately they are too soft to be useful for anything.

(neglecting to prune leads to: tangled mess, Overbears, Berries don’t ripen, Disease sets in, vines weaken, and eventually die.

I am the true vine. When Jesus says he is the *true* vine, that’s the equivalent of saying that he is the ‘true Israel’. In effect saying that God’s hopes rest on him now instead of on his people Israel. That’s a big claim. One that would have been hard for his followers to stomach. (not going to look at that any further today)

And my father is the gardener. 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.

To prune something successfully you have to do it carefully and with understanding. There’s a difference between pruning and hacking.

When J was a new born one of the things that terrified me most was having to trim his finger nails. I knew that if I didn’t do it, it would cause him problems. (There’s nothing more lethal to itself than a baby with long finger nails.) But it required such delicate trimming. One slip and I would have damaged his precious skin, and he hated it with a vengeance. But that pruning was an act of love – he didn’t like it, I didn’t like it – but it had to be done.

God the father is the gardener who is first of all going to get rid of the dead wood, and then he’s going to ever so carefully deal with the fruitful stuff, so that its’ *even more* fruitful. This gardener isn’t using loppers on a long pole, chopping from a distance – he’s right in amongst the vine with his secateurs, working delicately. Being as careful as a parent with a newborn.

The second time Jesus says ‘I am’ in this passage is in verse 5. ‘I am the vine; you are the branches’

The 'you' he's talking to are of course the disciples, gathered round him in the upper room, hanging on his every word. This is a message for his close followers. And those of us who call ourselves 'Christian' here can identify with that. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. What does 'to remain in someone' actually mean? The other word used is 'abide'. Basically to stay with them. To keep constant contact.

Yesterday we were at Jacksons of Old Arley (camping shop on way to Coventry) looking round the tent show room when we were approached by a little girl coming out of a tent crying and saying 'I've lost my mummy'. We were just off to find a shop assistant when a distraught mother appeared out of one of the other tents. And there were hugs and tears and I heard the mum say, 'stick with me now and you'll be okay'. She could have said 'remain with me', 'abide with me', keep constant contact.

### **Mystical**

Sometimes people have mystical experiences of remaining in Christ - being in Christ, or of Christ being in them, or along side them. Once in a life-time events. Many of you will know that Eunice met Jesus. She told of how in one of her lowest times He looked into her eyes and she looked into his. That was 'abiding' / remaining in him.

### **Stay attached; personal devotion/ community**

For the majority of us for most of the time remaining in Christ isn't about some mystical experience, but is about doing our best to stick with him, staying attached. That means remaining in the community that knows and loves him and celebrates him as Lord, and not wandering off to other places on our own. It's almost impossible to remain in Christ if we don't remain in fellowship and worship with other Christians.

Also remaining in him, staying attached to him, through prayer and worship in our private lives. Make sure to be in touch with Jesus, in tune with him, knowing him and being known by him, sticking with him.

### **Connectedness/interrelatedness**

Apart from me you can do nothing

This image of the vine is even more powerful ( I think) than Paul's image of the body found in Corinthians. Because Paul's body can function to a point without a toe, albeit not as efficiently as if it had the full complement. But become detached from the vine, and the result is death! There is no way for sap to spread, no source of nourishment. Apart from me you can do nothing.

### **Application**

There are some questions to ask ourselves this morning. Both personally and as a church, with regard to pruning and bearing fruit.

Firstly *are* we bearing fruit? We come at this passage from the assumption that we are. Could we actually be dead wood?

Travis song 'Oh drift wood....I've been drifting for a long long time.'

Now I realise that dead wood and drift wood are not actually the same thing, but maybe its true to say 'I've been dead wood for a long, long time.'

If we are in fact bearing fruit, are there areas where we have become overgrown? Which bits of our personal lives need a good prune? Which bits of our church life together needs a good prune.

' Christian community is not intended to be an uncontrolled luxuriant growth' (cant find who said that). But its about the fruit we bear.

Are we willing to submit to God as gardener and allow him to do his work? Will we trust that the gardening will be done close up with careful secateurs? Are there things we know need paring back, allowing for other areas to flourish? Are there bits that look really great, really strong and healthy, but actually have very little fruit?

And there are some reminders for us too.

A reminder that everything we do – everything – relies on Jesus as the source. He is the vine. Not us. We're just a few branches. We're nothing without him. There are all kinds of ways of becoming busy and occupied, numerous things we can get involved in as Christians, but unless Jesus remains the source then they're heading for disaster.

**Housegroup notes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010**  
**'I am the vine'**  
**John 15:1-8**

Jesus refers to himself as a vine twice in this passage. (v1) *I am the true vine and my father is the gardener.* (v5) *I am the vine; you are the branches.*

The vine was used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel, although with negative connotations, as every reference speaks of degeneration. (Psalm 80, Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2).

By calling himself the *true* vine, Jesus was saying that God's hopes rested on him now, and no longer on the nation of Israel.

Pruning of vines is essential for growth and bearing of more fruit, and God is the one who carries this out carefully amongst his people. It is impossible to prune effectively without intimate knowledge.

Branches cannot survive without the vine. 'Remaining' in Jesus means staying connected within the Christian community and personally with Him.

**For Discussion.**

1. Look up some of the Old Testament references to Israel as the vine (Ps 80, Is 5, Jer 2). What do we learn about God's chosen people? What does it mean for Jesus to say he is the *true* vine?
2. Imagine you are one of the disciples in the upper room. How will Jesus' words help you after his death?
3. The 'fruit' that is borne can be interpreted in more than one way (eg love, effective mission, product of a godly life, virtues of character, etc). What do you think 'fruit' is? Where can you see this fruit?
4. How do we 'remain' in Christ? What encourages you? What is difficult?
5. Are there areas of our life together as church where we have become overgrown? What needs pruning back so that more fruit can flourish?