



## Sermon

5<sup>th</sup> May 2024

### Love one another

John 15:9-17; 1 John 5:1-6, Acts 10:44-48

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The gospel reading follows on from last week's reading. Jesus was teaching his disciples on his last evening with them before he would be killed. Surely, whatever you choose to say to your followers on the eve of the day when you know you are going to die, is important. He chose to use the analogy of a vine and fruit bearing.

Jesus and the disciples had already left the Upper Room on their way to the Mount of Olives across the valley from Jerusalem. On the way, they would have passed the temple compound. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, twice mentioned that there was a golden grapevine over the portal of the temple. It was huge. Josephus wrote:

[Over the doors] was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the size and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators...<sup>1</sup>

"The clusters of grapes on that golden vine were as tall as the height of a man."<sup>2</sup>

It seems reasonable that as Jesus passed this golden vine with his disciples that he would use it as an illustration.

The grapevine was an important symbol for Israel throughout their history. It appears in scripture; it appeared in carvings; it was on their coins. Some of the accounts in scripture relate to Israel being God's vineyard and not producing the fruit which was expected.

So as Jesus walked he recast the imagery. Now he was the vine - the true vine – the real vine. Israel failed to produce the fruit expected but, he said, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

What does that imply? He gives us life and energy. He flows through us and produces fruit through us if we remain in him.

The heart of the parable is connection. We need to be connected to him. He used the word remain or abide eleven times in this chapter.

How does a branch draw life from the stem? It is the sap rising from the roots through the stem which supplies the branches. We have all seen a branch broken off a tree – the leaves wither, the wood dies, it dries out.

This connection to the main stem really is vital! We could liken it to being on a heart-lung machine, without those tubes the patient would die. We could liken it to the electrical system in your house – cut off the main switch and every appliance in your house is useless – dead.

So Jesus said, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." [verse 5]

The branches can only bear fruit when they are connected to the main stem of the vine – they get their food, water and very life from the vine and only then can they bear fruit.

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<sup>1</sup> Antiquities of the Jews 15:395

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish War 5:210

Today we continue as he develops that teaching further. There are three points I want to bring out: Remain in me; Love one another, You are Chosen.

### **Remain in my love (9-11)**

In verses 9-11, he tells them, “Remain in my love.” Trying harder is not the way to produce fruit. The best thing is to concentrate on remaining or abiding in Christ and the fruit will automatically be produced. The gardener will water and feed the vine and fruit will form.

The word translated “remain” means: to stay put, dwell, lodge, live, continue, abide. Do you get the idea? This is a permanent living arrangement in Christ.

Remain in my love – what does it mean? Perhaps if we look at the opposite, it may shed some light. If we do not remain in his love, perhaps it means that we cease to believe that he loves us.

On the other hand, Jesus said “If you love me, you will obey my commands.”<sup>3</sup> So abiding in his love means continuing to obey him.

In the Old Covenant, the people were to love God. In the ancient culture this meant to obey. How can anyone know if you love your ruler – it is your actions not interior emotions which prove it. When we love God, we obey him. We obey out of love.

We hear the same idea from the First Letter of John today:

“This is love for God: to obey his commands.”<sup>4</sup>

Commands sometimes have the sound of stern rules, but Jesus says in verse 11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.”

Compare it to love – if I rely on my own love for someone who is behaving badly to me, my own love seems to run dry pretty quickly, but if I ask the Lord to fill me with His love, it does not run dry. There is a quality about it which lingers and is strong enough to cope with anything. Similarly with joy – his joy has a deep quality about it that remains with us, despite adverse circumstances.

Jesus draws a parallel to our remaining in his love, with the way he remained in His Father’s love, a relationship marked by obedience. Abiding in Christ must never be reduced to a purely personal, inner, mystical state. It is practical – it means obeying amongst other things. Then in the same way that joy can co-exist with difficult circumstances, the clear conscience which comes from obedience will give us an inner peace.

Furthermore, this obedience is not a grim, teeth-gritting thing. Submitting to Christ is the way to freedom, bringing joy - the joy of Christ’s presence welling up in our hearts.

### **Love one another (12-13)**

The second point is that Jesus commands us, his followers, to love each other as he has loved us. What kind of love is this? The Greek word used all through this passage is *agape* – unconditional love. This is God’s love – it’s his very nature.

Paul describes it in these words:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”<sup>5</sup>

The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians may be seen as a description of love, with the words showing us facets of love:

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<sup>3</sup> Verse 10

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 5:3

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>6</sup>

So how loving are we? Try saying, “I am patient, kind, not envious, rude or self-seeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs, I am joyful, good, faithful, gentle and self controlled.” It’s quite telling isn’t it?

Love is about desiring and acting for the best of the person loved, it does not necessarily involve warm feelings. It is an active verb, not just a feeling like floating on a fluffy cloud. A feeling cannot be commanded yet Jesus does command us to love. Verse 12: “My command is this: love one another as I have loved you.”

So if he commands it, it must be possible for us to do it if we remember the first point – remain in me. We can love as we depend on him as our source.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote,

“Do not waste your time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.”

### **Practical outworking**

The obvious comment then is YBH: Yes But How. Perhaps it is that we count our own wishes less important than those of the other church member. Maybe we put ourselves out for them. Perhaps we honour the other person.

Maybe you have had a disagreement or have been hurt by someone. One of you has to make the first move to forgive the hurt. Why not let it be you?

### ***You are chosen (14-16)***

The third point is that we are chosen. Jesus said “You did not choose me – I chose you.” Being chosen for friendship is not our doing - if Jesus has chosen us as friends, that gives us tremendous security that his affection for us will not disappear.

Hear these words from 1 John 5:

v1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...

v12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

There is a security here. If you believe Jesus is the Christ (the anointed one of God), then you are born of God. You have the Son and so you can have confidence that you have eternal life.

Jesus said he called them friends because he told them his thoughts, whereas a servant is only given orders. So, we, his followers are chosen and his friends. Furthermore, we are appointed to bear fruit, fruit that lasts.

### **Conclusion**

When we reach verse 17, we read in the English Standard Version, “These things I command you, **so that** you will love one another.” That more truly picks up the sense of the Greek.

“These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” There is a hint here that the instructions he has just given enable us to love one another. So what things has he commanded?

- ❖ Remain in me
- ❖ Obey my commands
- ❖ Know that you are my friends
- ❖ Know that you are chosen & appointed

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<sup>6</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

❖ Be ready to lay down your lives for each other

The command is clear. But let's remember the helps we have to obey. We are to live this life in Christ himself and allow the Spirit to indwell us so that he empowers us.

We are to obey his commands, take our direction from him, secure in the knowledge of being loved and chosen by him. We are his friends and appointed to bear fruit. As we do that we will find that the resources we need are provided – the sap will flow through the vine to us, branches. We see a dramatic first flow of that sap in the reading from Acts when the Holy Spirit filled the members of Cornelius' household. There was an overflow of spiritual life.

All Christians have the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Sometimes the Holy Spirit comes in power before baptism as in that account, often after commitment and baptism in water. The important thing is to be baptised in water and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you have wondered about the Holy Spirit, maybe you long for more of Him. If so, the Alpha course which starts on Tuesday would be a good place to explore that. It is the focus of four of the sessions.

God bless you and me - as we remain in Christ, obey his commands and love one another.