

## SERMON

John 15:1-8

We are Branches in a Vine

Nunawading and Waverley, 2-5-21

Dear friends in Christ,

What a glorious thing to be a branch in a vine. Christ is this true vine and we are the branches. That simple image means his life, his love, his victories and his power to redeem us are flowing from him and into us, like sap in a tree. If we grow old and die, we are still attached to the true vine.

A vine naturally wants to grow. Its DNA determines its shape; it has a plan for growth so that roots, leaves, branches and fruit are formed and its habit as a vine materialises as it holds onto a trellis and its laterals extend. Again, the meaning of the image is really obvious for us. Once justified by faith in Christ, then the Holy Spirit begins this great project of sanctification, of increasing our holiness, love for the Lord and obedience to his will. Gradually, little by little, we take on the shape we were meant to be, that is, to be like Christ. Fruit will comprise kindness, honesty, and hard work. There will be a desire to serve others and to witness to them. The joy of the Lord coming from the roots and the trunk of Christ will move us to worship, to hear his word and receive him in the Lord's Supper. Fellow Christians become our friends and since the Spirit is building the church, we grow closer to each other. What we have we share and the troubles of other believers become ours.

Jesus explained what the farmer does from year to year. His Father is the vine dresser and as branches become thin, or diseased or too straggly, he cleans them so that they produce more fruit. Being here today is an opportunity to reflect on our lives and assess ourselves against the word of the Lord. The confession of sins is the chance to think of things that may be unruly or how you could be gentler, could speak up rather than hold back, could help or need to trust without anxiety. While things going wrong frustrate me, they are an opportunity to seek the Lord in his word, to pray and to try and be more reliant on him. Our Father is a gentle pruner.

What if branches detach themselves from the vine, thinking, I'll go it alone? This is that same as asking: can I give birth to myself, can I save myself, can I create a universe or can I provide deliverance for the world of people? The really

amazing thing is that Christians can act like that, believing that they do not need the vine anymore. That is why Christ says: Remain in me and I in you. Just as the branch cannot produce fruit of itself unless it is in the vine so you cannot if you do not remain in me.

The same could be said of the church. A vine wants to grow and be a vine producing fruit; it seeks the sun and grows towards it, pushing out more and more branches enabling more photosynthesis to take place and ever more bunches of grapes. What if a church becomes ingrown, or argues and squabbles amongst itself, or is satisfied with its existing fruit and doesn't want to reach out for Christ? Can a church feed off its own fruit and not eventually run out of fresh growth and die?

Christ's vision for the church is that it thrives, growing in numbers and maturity and open to all the nations. At Waverley, we have been guided in finding a suitable person to be our evangelist. Our church is trying to be a branch in the true vine bearing fruit for Christ. We have found through the English Conversation Club that people of other ethnic backgrounds seem more receptive to hearing the good news of Christ. Our thoughts are that this is an area that could be fruitful. Our Lord Jesus is calling on us to trust him; if we love him and his truth and want to share his word with others then we can be confident he will support us in our mission: If you remain in me and my words remain in you whatever you wish and ask for, it will be given to you.

Think of another analogy. If you were running a clothing shop in The Glen or at Forest Hill existed only to pay its staff. The staff came each day because they were paid well and spent the time trying on the new lines that came in. Customers were seen as an interruption because they required effort. If sales kept declining and the store was no longer profitable, would you not shut it down? The answer is simple: let's be the church of all nations, the church of Pentecost, reaching everyone for Christ. His power, his word and grace are flowing within us. If we unblock it, then there will be a bursting forth of new growth, branches, leaves and grapes. Two Chinese Christian groups have contacted me in the last 14 days looking for a place to rent. The Lord is blessing them because they are unblocking the power they have from the Risen Christ within them.

Craig Springer, US Alpha leader, has said that the fundamental questions people can identify with have changed. For Baby Boomers they were:  
'How can you prove Christianity is true?

How can I be forgiven for my sin?

How can I know I'll go to heaven?

He writes, 'Millennials have shifted the questions to more of a self-fulfillment self-actualisation journey:

How can I find purpose?

How can I deal with loneliness and emptiness?

What will help me live a great life now?

Where can I find an answer to the injustices in this broken world?

Where can I find restoration for my soul and a people to live this out with?

Our call is not only to be multi-national as church but learn how to be multi-generational. Why not aim now for a church worker who can lead us in mission to the Millennials? Anything can be possible when remaining in the true vine.