

JOHN the beloved disciple: the roots, shoots and fruits of life with Jesus

John 15

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

- **Introducing St John**

- On screen - a rood: the familiar picture of John and Mary at foot of cross Jn 19.25-7
- Mark's Gospel my favourite when younger; now John now: diving deeper.
- Recommended - Jean Vanier: *Drawn in to the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*
- But believe John accurate on history too: see John Robinson, *The Priority of John*
- NB I take traditional view of identity of John the Evangelist with John the Apostle and John the writer of the epistles (possibly Revelation too)
- So John's Gospel is an amazing layer-cake of John's thinking and feeling
 - as a young man, ?17 (cf modern students)
 - as a church leader and evangelist
 - as an old man looking back on it all ("love one another")
- Clear that his young encounter with Jesus defined his life
 - Already knew Jesus as cousin (father Zebedee married to Salome, sister to Mary, mother of Jesus)

- But at baptism saw JC in whole new light, and followed him (did his mother and aunt ask JC to keep an eye on him?)
 - Revelation on Mt of Transfiguration - one of those seeing-through moments
 - And during Passion veil really starts to drop
- In Jesus, John would come to know
 - Who he was
 - Where he belonged
 - What he has to do
 - Going to look at each of these in turn (and of course ask the same questions of ourselves) and use a particular image as a framework
 - One that only John records for us and one that must have made a great impression on him - The Vine.
- **The Vine**
 - The scene is outside the Temple in Jerusalem: en route Supper > Gethsemane
 - Know from Josephus and Talmud that a great golden vine there
 - A place of teaching; the vine was a symbol of Israel as God's people
 - One that has stuck: from Great Mosque of Damascus to Anglo-Saxon High Crosses
 - Jesus gives disciples an object lesson in God's new way for us to be his people
 - Jesus self-identified with Suffering Servant
 - But more: came to see self as Son of God, offering a new way for Israel to be his people
 - Great themes of Israelite identity re-presented
 - Sheep have new Good Shepherd
 - Temple is rebuilt, with veil torn away
 - Vine in God's vineyard is to be fruitful again
 - And the starting point is to be their & our relationship with him
 - His love for us
 - Our love for him
 - Our love for one another
 - And our love for the world he loves so much, a love he has called us to share and continue
 - The foot-washing and the new commandment at the Supper had been both a demonstration of the need for love (squabbling) and a commissioning to do it
 - Now Jesus uses the Vine to take the teaching further
- **Roots: Who he is**
 - First journey of John is into discovering who he is
 - Today's world longs for roots and authenticity
But is sold out to consumer choice and short term living
 - Back to that amazing first call; and the deep sense of being called friend, beloved, a master to follow (no indication of sexual dimension here)

- Jesus calls us back to the roots that really matter - in God through him
 - A radical challenge in a relativistic world; but called to both believe and belong, to abide
 - Key to resolving the sense of difficulty is to realise that this is above all an expression of love by God, and is for all, at his ultimate cost
 - And if we can receive it, it is such good news, as we hear and find real love, real welcome, real truth, real goodness, real worth.
 - Someone to believe in and be believed in by. Doesn't that scratch where we itch? And who shall we let rob us of healing like this?
- *Illustration of the invitation in Rublev's famous icon, inviting us into the company round the table; even ourselves as saints in "altar" niche*
- There's a choice to be made
 - Call to abiding relationship, not isolated living or a quick call home
 - In prayer
 - In the scriptures
 - In our services
 - In our service
- **Shoots: Where he belongs**
 - John's second discovery is about where he belongs
 - Who knows Greek? All the you's in this passage were *plural*.
In God's design, who we are is a plural thing; we belong together
He is building a kingdom, a new community, creation as it should be
 - JOHN 2-3 years following Jesus with the 12, the meals, the late-night discussions, the teaching; learning, memorising, writing down.
 - Today's world all about the massively global or the microscopically individual
 - Jesus calls us back to real community at real human scale
 - A radical challenge to an individualistic world
 - But offers us somewhere to belong, to be loved and to love in our turn
 - And that is for everyone: no part is too unworthy
 - All come as sinners and all are offered salvation and discover that they have a contribution to make
 - We may feel very small and everything may seem very hopeless
 - But we are God's chosen and mysterious way of bringing new life to the world
 - *Illustration - mustard seeds: if you feel small and vulnerable (for yourself or the church) look how they grow!*
 - There's a challenge to take up
 - From disciples through epistles to now: all too many times when these Christians have not loved one another

- A massive history of exclusion and splits and massive challenges now
 - But a massive calling and a massive opportunity: can we at least get the Spirit right? And see where the Spirit then leads us?
- **Fruits: what he has to do**
 - And finally for John, he is set on a course for what he has to do
 - NB the natural and organic way that discovering who we are had led to where we belong and now what we must do
 - Jesus has now been speaking very openly about his death. What next? John is realising that carrying on Jesus's ministry is his own life's work
 - The same Spirit of self-giving love has flowed from Father to Son to Spirit and from them to us in order that it might flow out into the world
 - Jesus calls us back to live in the way we were designed to live, with self-giving love
 - A radical challenge to a selfish world
 - Been a big lesson to learn in the team here about loving one another, and still some learning to do
 - Vital though that it doesn't stop there
 - Perhaps because we always have such needs and such great lessons to learn, always been all too easy for church to stay focussed on itself
 - And in an age of anxiety, that it both fruitless and dangerous
 - The church re-discovers its soul, its spirit and its mission when it looks away from its own needs and looks to the needs of others
 - Isn't that deep down what we want the church to be like?
 - *Illustration - the caravan and Christmas fridges: even good things can go off, spectacularly*
 - and this is what happens to us and the church when we don't put what we've been given to good use
- **There's work to do**
 - And the good news is that it can begin with us, now
 - In fact it already has begun: in a myriad of ways through a multitude of people like you
 - All we need to do is a bit of letting go and letting God
 - Enjoying the love of God
 - Enjoying loving one another and being loved
 - Enjoying taking that love to a world in need, with the loving smile of God.
 - As Jesus said
 - You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. AMEN.