



Sunday Reflection

Season of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 2 May 2021

Easter 5

In our Gospel reading today we will hear how Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches who are called to bear much fruit. We come together to worship, to affirm our dependence on God and to commit to being fruitful disciples..

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." John 15:8

An Illustration to set the scene

When you sow a seed, there is first the anticipation of waiting for germination. Depending on what species you sow, this can take anything from a few days to several months, or even years.

Grape seeds take between two and eight weeks – the more sunlight the seed receives each day, the quicker the germination.

But then, as any gardener knows, there is the thinning-out process. Most people plant several seeds per pot in the hope that at least one will grow. If they all germinate they compete for light and nutrients.

It can feel counterintuitive to choose just one, the strongest and most promising, to grow on, and get rid of the others, but it's a process which has to be done in order to grow a strong plant.

Many gardeners get sentimental about their seedlings and attempt to grow them all on.

This doesn't end well – instead of one strong plant, they end up with two or more plants which are weaker and slower-growing.

Later, when the grapevine has established itself and is growing into a sturdy plant, it will start to throw out shoots.

Now, again, decisions have to be made – only one or two shoots can be allowed to grow and be trained up stakes to become fruiting branches, the rest being cut back.

In vineyards around the world this is known as the Guyot system.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The parable in today's Gospel makes hard reading.

Having first cut away all but a couple of branches of his grapevine, the vine-grower then removes any remaining ones that are not fruiting and throws them on the fire.

He is interested only in the branches that bear fruit – the rest are expendable.

What God wants, the parable says, is disciples who will bear much fruit.

Those who abide in Jesus will bear fruit, but those who do not bear fruit will be cast aside as rubbish, their lack of fruitfulness evidence of their lack of faithfulness as disciples.

The relationship of dependence that exists between the branch and the vine reflects that between the disciple and Jesus.

Just as the branch cannot fruit by its own efforts without being part of the vine, neither can disciples bear fruit in their lives without abiding in Jesus.

While that is great for the branches that bear fruit, we cannot help thinking that it is less good news for the branches that are pruned and thrown into the fire.

And, if we are honest, many of us are probably thinking that we are more likely to be cut off and thrown away – an idea that is quite challenging if we believe in a loving God – because we fear we may not be very good at bearing fruit.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

There are no easy answers to the conundrum of how a loving God can advocate pruning and discarding those whom God has created.

Maybe the parable is about not merely living for ourselves – the unfruitful branches – but through our lives providing sustenance and nourishment to others.

And, as any gardener knows, pruning fruitful branches will make them more fruitful next season – so even the fruitful disciple can expect setbacks and challenges in life.

Whatever the true meaning, however, what we can do is ask ourselves what fruitfulness might look like in our own lives.

Fruitfulness is about abundance – one seed yielding a great quantity of sweet fruit, out of all proportion to the original seed. It's about bounty – generosity, not only in terms of money and material resources, but also generosity of mind and spirit. It is about celebration – God's gifts of soil, rain and sun have brought into being something out of almost nothing, something good that enriches and sustains life.

With the seed of God's Word planted in our hearts, how can we best be fruitful?

Each person's opportunities will be different, but we can each commit to abiding in Jesus and consciously seek to bear fruit that glorifies God.

Our lives can bear fruit in our actions, our words, our relationships and our attitudes to God's creation.

If our lives benefit only ourselves, we have to question whether we are, in fact, the unfruitful branches.

“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” John 15:8

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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