

Small Group Notes – 2nd April 2017

Ice Breaker (optional)

How good are you at tending plants? Is this something you enjoy?

Theme: I am the vine, you are the branches

Readings: John 15:1-8

Sermon Outline

This passage is from Jesus addressing the disciples at the last supper, talking about what is to come – his betrayal, death and resurrection – and what it means to be a disciple.

The vine is an “organic” metaphor for the community of believers, similar to images like “body”, “bride” & “living stones”, describing a supernatural relationship.

A vine needs tending over decades. Some plants are vigorous while others need careful attention. They need fertiliser and protection.

Vines and vineyards were a familiar Old Testament image for Israel: Psalm 80:8-9 relates to the Exodus; Hosea 10:1 & Isaiah 5:1-2 wild vines; Ezekiel 15:6 dead branches to be burnt.

Jesus is the vine, the church forms its branches, with God the vine dresser. Fruitfulness is the result of the Son’s life being reproduced in a disciple.

- What does it look like to be a branch? A branch must be part of the vine. The word “remain (or “abide”) occurs 8 times in this passage, 40 times in the gospel plus 27 in John’s letters. We must accept Jesus as Saviour, and continue or persevere in faith, in loving obedience to God.

- Video of the Brownlee brothers – Johnny was totally dependent on Alistair, with no sense of direction or hope of finishing alone. Active dependence on God means recognising we rely on his grace, not on human success or the physical comforts we enjoy.
- A barometer of our relationship with Christ is our prayer life. Paul urges us to “pray without ceasing” – this flows out of our dependence on God.
- The branches together embody the qualities of the vine. The distinctiveness of the church should derive from its relationship to God and Jesus, not the gifts of individual members. Do people on our frontline see us as embodying the qualities of God? Could they respond, as the sports commentator on the video did, “I’ve never seen anything like it”?

Questions of Application

- 1) How does God prune us to enable us to bear more fruit? Is it painful?
- 2) What does remaining (or abiding) in Jesus mean for you?
- 3) What fruit do we produce, as individuals and as the local church?
- 4) How close do you come to “praying without ceasing”? How can we approach this better?
- 5) Do those on your frontline see the qualities of God through you?