

## Notes on John 15 : 9 - 17 'Managing into life, fruitfulness and glory'

For all of us who had the joy of having children, you know that when this child is born your whole world is turned upside down by this little rampant life. This is especially true for first-time parents when the sensation of not knowing what to do with this child is at times overwhelming. One of the best lessons we ever learned was to ask for help and then to learn 'structure', if I can put it that way, to help us cope with this full-on little life!! When Jesus uses the image of a vine, he welcomes each of us to a rampant God filled life, a life of awe and wonder as we know Jesus' astonishing vibrancy which he pours into each one of us. Such a wild, Holy Spirit life needs structure, or form, so that we may all grow up more into his likeness and image, of down, down, deeper and down into his love and further up and further out as we share his love in his world.

At the last couple of church meetings, we have thought a lot about the diagram which describes 'Doing Life Together'. I am very grateful to those who have prayed through and come up with this and I love the sense of interconnectedness which it describes. I am especially grateful to those who have developed this as it is something I would love to be able to do but I just can't.

The heart of the trellis we see before us is community, family and friendship. As it says in Genesis 2, it is not good for man, or for any of us, to be alone and at the men's weekend last week I was deeply reminded that our faith and life is to be rooted in the community and love of the Father, Son and Holy. This life, community and love invites us to both embrace, but also reject, the cultural mores we see around us. We are to embrace the yearning for community and family which our culture is so desperate for as it struggles to deal with the desperate isolation, we see so much around us. We must confess that too often our faith has been defined primarily as JAM, that is Jesus And Me, whereas the Bible speaks far more often of us as believers as a People or a Family. But at the same time, we are to reject the intense tribalism we see all around us of where you only do community with those who are like you, whether it be the same age, taste in music, gender or sexuality. In the safety, yet sameness, of such groups our humanity can become somehow shrink wrapped to fit the smallness of those who are just like us. Whereas Jesus says that if we are to remain in his love, then we are to love each other as we are, however hard and difficult that that may be.

In a conversation recently I really struggled with the idea of joining a small group and, as I wondered why I was responding so; I remembered a very painful memory of over 25 years ago when I was asked to leave a house group in my first church because my being there hindered the group because people did not feel free to say what was on their hearts. At one level this sounds quite reasonable but for me I was left with a profound sense of isolation and that it would be best for me if I was to keep people at arm's length. This deep and painful sense of rejection, and its associated emotions, was something I had not realised was there before, but I now realise this has affected my relationships with many people. The joyful irony is, is that it is by being in a small group I will be able to healing and renewal which is something I have never imagined possible before.

The diagram describes the size of trellis and our choosing to do this very strange thing called being all together on a Sunday. Our desire is to be shaped even more by this rampant God filled life Jesus invites us into and to do this by choosing to be all together. To enable this, we will have four core groups who will plan and encourage us in our worship together, in our learning together, in our participating in small groups and in our praying together. The heart behind this is that we may continue to treasure but also receive from each other as a whole community.

This autumn we will be doing this as we ponder our way through the Psalms together as we listen to those who will be preaching for us, but also as we share what Jesus has said to us as we follow the Psalms week by week or when you speak about a Psalm that has helped you when life has been good or just not great. In September we will also celebrate harvest and our weekend will include a Saturday night concert, as well as a Harvest party on Sunday afternoon and we would love for you to come to one or even both of these occasions. Our gathering on a Sunday is the 'shop window' of our doing life together. We know it is imperfect, but as imperfect as it is, it is also a vehicle of God's *agape*, or love as described in verses 12 and 13 being known in and among us. This is what the table before us reminds and teaches us of. It speaks of how we have been loved by God, but also it challenges us all to love in such a way too.

Finally, the desire of the trellis is for us as a church to be a vehicle of Good News to all we meet that they may know Jesus in their lives, and that this town may be enriched by how we love and serve this town. I am always amazed by the many ways we do this and next week we have Holiday Club and then DTI which are great testimonies to both Andy and Zania and to the teams which make such events possible.

Jesus says, 'I am the vine' and his prayer for us is for his wildfire love and life to run wild in and among us all. The question we should then be asking is, 'How?' The answer we suggest is this model of doing life together, but it will only be an effective trellis if, in fact it is the way we commit ourselves to live as we 'Do Life Together'.

### Questions John 15 : 9 - 17 'Managing into life, fruitfulness and glory'

- 1 Describe the times when you have known this rampant God filled life.
- 2 What is your response to our model of 'doing Life Together'?
- 3 With who do you share your life in Jesus with and how does this help you know and grow more in him and have you known times of isolation which Andy experienced?
- 4 Our questionnaire asked a lot of questions about our Sunday morning worship and what do you value the most as we worship together as a wide diversity of people?
- 5 In our wide variety of sharing the Good News of Jesus and enriching our community what stories do you know which gives you the greatest encouragement?
- 6 What will it take for you to enable our 'trellis' of 'Doing Life Together' to work as effectively as we hope?