

Notes on John 15 : 1 - 8 'Choosing life, fruitfulness and glory'

Whose mission statement is this? "To create a better everyday life for the many people." It is the company IKEA and they are committed not only to the style of their furniture, they are also equally committed to the wellbeing of those who make their products and the communities they are part of, as well as us who put them together!! Jesus has a similar vision and he describes it here in verse 5. His desire is that for each one of us, we may know fruitfulness, we may know life in all its fulness, we may live a life of abundance where our life overflows with him. I know this is your heart and soul too, because this is what you said in our questionnaire and it is the heart of what we calling 'Doing Life Together'.

What do you think came first; the chicken or the egg? Genesis 1 verse 22 clearly says the answer is the chicken, but I did watch a fascinating video by the physicist Stephen Hawking who very persuasively argued for the egg!! Chicken and egg style of questions assume there is no clear answer and that they can never be unresolved. When we think of our learning to live out the life of Jesus it is tempting to ask, do we focus solely on Jesus the vine, who pours his life into us, or do we focus on the trellis which holds this vine up? The answer, as we all know, is both but the focus must be on Jesus and here in John 15 he says that he, and he alone, is the vine and that all of the life we will ever need is in him and in him alone. Jesus in making this statement is drawing on familiar Old Testament language of the story of Israel being planted in the Promised Land, but also of God's judgment when he tore down its protective wall and their experience of Exile and then the story of his replanting the vine. The importance and significance of this story was immortalised in stone when Herod had a vine carved into the very front of the Temple to remind Israel of who they were, and the role he as King had. Jesus, as he always does, took this image and turned it on its head when he said that he is both the new and authentic vine, or Israel as well as being her true and life giving King. Jesus claims that the life promised, described and hoped for in the Old Testament is in him, and him alone, because he is the one who brings in the New Covenant and the promised fulness of the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of our 'Doing Life Together'. Its whole purpose is to enable us all to know this life of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, of the New Covenant more and more, and fuller and fuller in our lives. But, and this is very important, our focus must always be on Jesus as the vine and not, dare I say, in 'Doing Life Together'. To think 'Doing Life Together' matters more than Jesus, is to put the trellis above the vine. Instead, we are to realise its importance and value its support in facilitating the life of Jesus in and among us, but it is never to replace it.

Jesus as the vine invites and draws us into knowing the vibrant life of the Trinity, I described earlier in the year, through the word *perichoresis*. This very clunky word reminds us that the language of our God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not to confuse or bemuse us, but astound us, as we are drawn into the dance of the life of God that is all around us. In verse 1 our focus is on Jesus and, as with all the I am sayings, Jesus demands that we fix our eyes on him that we may know and live out his life in ours more and more. This is what shaped Dirk Willems in the story we heard this morning where he had no choice but to love his enemy in that situation. We fix our eyes on Jesus by knowing him more and more in our minds as we think on him, in our hearts as we learn to love him and, in our soul, as we know his love in our hearts.

We fix our eyes on him by learning to practice knowing his presence 'This Time Tomorrow'. By this I mean that whatever we may be doing, we choose to do it in his name and for his sake knowing he is there with us. We fix our eyes on him by pondering, praying and devoting ourselves to him as we think of him who died for us. All of these are examples of what it means when Jesus speaks of our remaining in him, as in verse 4, and I am sure you could think of more.

We are to submit ourselves to the Father's loving touch as the gardener of our lives. As the gardener he removes and prunes which is an uncomfortable and disturbing description of the Father at work in our lives because it speaks of God in control, and not us, as he works within us. Verse 2 speaks of God's 'No' in our lives and it is one way we are to use to help us understand challenging and difficult times in our lives. It is wrong to say that it is the only way of thinking of such times, but it is a healthier attitude than the question 'Why me?' which focuses only on me in such times. We are dared to believe the Father's intent is for us to be more fruitful in our lives, but it is still a challenging trust to hold onto.

Finally, to know Jesus as the vine, we are to know the life of the Spirit in and among us. Jesus speaks of this when he describes the Spirit as a stream of living water gushing up in us, as in John 7 verse 38 or as the Paraclete in John 14 verse 16. Jesus reminds us that when we think of the Spirit, we are not to think of him as being like a 'bolt on' in our lives. Instead, he is fundamental and central to our knowing the life of the vine, of our being fruitful in him and living out the glory of those renewed by him, because God's New Creation is both the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

When we think of Jesus as the vine, our focus is on God's intent for us to be fruitful as we live in the everlasting dance of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this dance which enables us all to be truly and fully human in all that we are and as we continue to be transformed by Jesus to be more like him. As we dance, or remain in him, so we engage with him in our lives, we enable all we meet to know him and we seek to enrich this community in which we live. When you ask me 'How are we to do this?' I will then speak about the value and importance of the trellis we are discerning together as a church to develop and live out as we seek to 'Do life together'.

Questions John 15 : 1 - 8 'Choosing life, fruitfulness and glory'

- 1 What strikes you most about Jesus' 'mission statement' in verse 5 and why?
- 2 When you think of Jesus being the vine, what jumps out at you the most?
- 3 Why is this picture also about Jesus being our King and what does it mean for him to rule over us in our lives?
- 4 How do you understand our model of church as 'Doing Life Together'? How can it help each one of us learn to know the life, fruitfulness and glory of Jesus in us?
- 5 This picture speaks of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What challenges, excites and helps you in your thinking of this vine imagery and our living in it?