**28th April John 15: 1 - 8**

**1**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.
**2**He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26691a)] to make it bear more fruit.
**3**You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.
**4**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.
**5**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.
**6**Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.
**7**If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
**8**My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

To get our head around this reading, understand that Jesus was a teacher, that is what Rabbi actually means, and Jesus often used whatever was at hand to illustrate his teachings, and in practising his extensive range of teaching skills, he picked up a nearby vine and said these words:
“I am the true vine, and My Father is the Vine grower”.  There were many vines on the slopes of Jerusalem, um, there still are actually, so Jesus probably stopped by one of these, to use it as a visual aid as he was speaking. But, in a time of great pressure before his arrest, we could well ask, why was Jesus talking like this?

Well, it would seem that he was preparing them for a new time, where he had the foresight to realise that he would not always be physically present with them, but hopefully, it would be a time when they would be even closer to Him than before. His analogy was that believers should be joined to Christ like branches to a vine.  He expected that it would be an intimate, internal, spiritual union. Believers are like branches in the Vine bearing grapes, drawing their life-sap from the central stock. So, Jesus was setting forth the spiritual dynamics of this new relationship and fellowship.

Now, I did a bit of reading on this subject, which involved looking at several commentaries. I was to discover that there are a few commentaries with weird concepts in the interpretation of this text.

I expect some of these commentaries were delivered with such a hellfire and damnation, that I can imagine parishioners who could be upset by this sort of interpretation and delivery. I found that such is the chronic variation of ideas with the vine story, that it was interesting to find the thoughts of Martin Luther whose amusement was such that he was to comment, "When the angels want a good laugh, they read the commentaries."

So, casting ambiguity aside, and looking further into the New Testament, I formed the opinion that the fruit of which Jesus is referring to here is Christlikeness. I found the Apostle Paul’s, interpretation was "The fruit of the Spirit" (that which the Spirit produces) "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and most important of all, self-control". Now here we have nine qualities gathered as one cluster, just as a grapevine produces a cluster of fruit. It consists, really, of the spiralling application of the first three, love, joy, and peace. As those fundamentals reach out to involve the relationships of life, it appears to me, that love, joy, and peace are the fruit to which he particularly he expected in us.

We draw strength from this on Sundays, and to quote page 487 of our own prayer book, we who share his cup draw strength from the one true vine.

Also, in another part of this text, what did Jesus mean when he said abide in me? Again, there are some quite interesting interpretations of what Jesus meant about abiding so I will give you, my interpretation.

Commonly, abide is used with reference to laws, rules, and traditions. We abide by the laws of the land, and furthermore, we here at church also endeavour to abide by Anglican Christian worship.

Look, we were all born knowing nothing, and we learned about life very quickly. What we abide by is usually based on our developing values, which initially are influenced in our respective childhood days by our parents. While some of us also had the good fortune to be encouraged to abide by the values influenced by our religious beliefs, we are also influenced by the standards and expectations of the social groups we belong to. This social learning is a continuous process, in which, over a period of time, our acquired standards are elaborated, sometimes modified and new ones are adopted. A wonderful current example is a welcome change in attitudes towards the positive realities of developing unity within our bi-cultural country.

These are social standards which are gradually, albeit very slowly, changing for the good of all New Zealand citizens.

Looking back, we all went through a period where we were expected to abide by the school rules and as our lives progressed into the grown-up world, these rules were replaced by legal codes of practice, and professional codes of ethics. In our personal lives, there is a significant expectation of the society we live in to abide by codes of moral behaviour. In any organisation, whether it be professional or social, there is a social structure with expectations of certain social norms. To abide, means to obey by staying within the boundaries of an established and expected system.

Within this broad constructivist process in our personal lives, we abide by social influence, value issues, social etiquette, cultural conventions, and ethical principles. In these matters that consider one’s personal values, we refer to the decision-making process as one involving morality. Morality is concerned with the goodness or badness of one’s disposition, or the distinction between what other people judge to be right or wrong.

Indeed, it is the people that judge us, and interestingly, society’s conception and judgement of morality is the exclusive domain of humanity. Animals act through instinct and are not held accountable for moral judgement. Similarly, machines are not held morally accountable for the dumb actions of their operators.

But the disciples understanding would be stretched further as Jesus helped them to grasp that abide means to endure the uncertain future. Jesus offered them comfort, security, and a relational environment in which they could survive in an unpredictable future.

But his expectation of the disciples went further than that. He had breathed the Holy Spirit into them with the intention that they should heal, serve the poor, and spread the good news to all his consequent followers, that include us here today.

Abide in me, said Jesus, as I abide in you. This is a call from Christ to remind us that Christ’s mission should be the centre piece of what shapes us. No matter what pressures the world exerts on us, we should remain faithful to Christ. With this faith, we need never be alone in dealing with whatever impediment may be thrown in our path.

Abiding has to do with seeing, hearing, and serving God, and making a difference in our community. The point here is that abiding in him is the most important fundamental of being a Christian. Remember, the abiding mission of this church is to know and make known, the love of God. It is written out there as we walk in the door. If we persist, we will continue to draw strength from the one true vine, and never be the dead wood that is thrown into the fire and burned.

Amen.