It seems that whenever we have people come and visit us from the UK, they are always surprised by the vineyards.

"I didn't even know the Swiss made wine" is a phrase we often hear

Whereas for myself, having been here for a year now, I almost take them for granted!

But Jesus' words in John chapter 15, have helped me see vines in a new light… because I think they serve as a very helpful visual reminder of what it means to be Christian today

… just as they would have done for the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking, in our passage for this today.

This Sunday is the last in our summer series looking at the "I am" sayings of Jesus… And today we consider what it means for Jesus to be the true vine… and as always, this phrase tells us a lot about Jesus.

But I want us to see how it is also very instructive for us, because it teaches us what being a follower of Jesus is all about

Let's pray together, and then read the passage together…

Now as is often the case, when Jesus talks about being the "I am"… the background to what he says is found in the Old Testament.

So when Jesus talks about being the true vine, whilst our living on this side of the lake means we are quite familiar with what a vine *looks* like… if we are to properly understand what Jesus means, then we need to listen to what he says, in light of the Old Testament.

and this brings me to our first heading…

#1 - Jesus is the true vine who will bear much fruit

Many nations have a national flower to represent the country

… in England, it's a rose

France… a lily

maple leaf of Canada

and of course the edelweiss of Switzerland

But for the nation of Israel, it was the vine

Back in Jesus' day, you would find the vine on some of their coins… but perhaps most significantly, at the temple entrance in Jerusalem… where the historian Josephus, describes a huge golden vine that hung there, with grape clusters as "*tall as a man*" (Jewish War v.210-212)

… and this is because again and again in the Old Testament, one way that God refers to the nation of Israel, is as His vineyard

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this is in Isaiah 5vv1-7

… God did all that was necessary, for this vineyard to produce good grapes, but there in v2.. it yielded only wild grapes… literally "*stink fruit*"

… this is all explained for us in v7…

The vineyard represents God's people.. and the fruit God rightly expected was justice and righteousness but he found only bloodshed and outcry

And the rest of the chapter is about the LORD lamenting over the nation's greed, and debauchery, and arrogance and injustice, and ultimately its failure to live in obedience to God's nature

The vineyard therefore, will be left to ruin, the walls and hedges pulled down, the pruning of the vines will stop.. thorns will grow up in its place, and animals will trample the garden

… it is a sombre picture of the failure of the vineyard… the failure of God's people to produce good fruit… the failure of God's people to live the lives God wanted them to live

The nation of Israel were supposed to be God's means of blessing to the nations around them!

But when other nations looked at this vineyard…

they saw only *stink fruit*

… they saw nothing of God, in God's people

… no reflection of God's character, in those who were made in God's image

But then here in John 15, Jesus tells us that God the Father, has planted a new vine… the true vine

… [verse 1] Jesus says… *"I am the true vine"*.. and my father is the vinedresser

So just as the manna in the OT, foreshadowed Jesus as the *true bread* from heaven

So the vineyard in the OT, foreshadowed Jesus as the *true vine*

… Jesus is the true vine that will bear good fruit

… where God's people failed in the past… Jesus will succeed…

And so when you look at Jesus… you do not find bloodshed and outcry

… rather you see righteousness and justice and selflessness and humility and obedience to God the Father… Jesus obeys God the father perfectly

Look at Jesus and you see no stink fruit… only good fruit!

But here's the thing… it is not only Jesus, the true vine, who will produce this good fruit… it is actually all those who are Jesus' followers… all christian believers!

Because when we look at Jesus' words here… Jesus talks a lot about bearing fruit… and a lot about *the branches…* who bear this fruit

And so to my 2nd heading…

#2 - Jesus is the true vine whose branches will bear much fruit to the glory of God the Father

verse 5 makes it clear that the branches of Jesus, the true vine, are Jesus' followers… those who are *in Jesus*… Christian believers

… or in the language of verse 3… the "*branches who are clean*", because of the word that Jesus has spoken to them

Already in ch 13 & 14… Jesus has made clear that this refers to those who believe Jesus' words, trust Jesus words, live by Jesus words…

… or in the language of last weeks sermon, those who come to Jesus as the way the truth and the life… are made clean in God's sight

… those who rely entirely on Jesus' death in their place, for forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, are united to Jesus in as intimate a way… as complete a way… as organic a way, as a branch is to a vine

Just as branches derive life from the vine, and the vine produces its fruit thru the branches

… so Christians derive their life from Jesus, and Jesus produces fruit thru his followers

All Christians have the extraordinary privilege of being called into unity with Jesus

… and with that privilege, comes a great purpose

… to bear good fruit!!

But we are then immediately faced with a problem… it is found there in verse 4

This is very significant because in the past couple of chapters, Jesus has made it very clear that he is going to soon, be leaving them… and yet verse 4 says that *only those* branches that are "in him" will bear fruit

So how will that work?

… If the true vine ascends to heaven, how can any branch remain "in him"?

Well Jesus has already taught his disciples, that it is good that he returns to heaven because then he will send the Holy Spirit

… So just as a branch is *physically* connected to a vine

The Christian believer is *spiritually* connected to the *true* vine

… Even though Jesus is no longer physically present, his branches are still connected to the true vine by the Holy Spirit

This helps us make sense of verse 2, which talks about unfruitful branches being taken away

Now we need to be very careful here.. and very clear (hopefully)!

For verse 2 can sound like someone could be a Christian to start with, but if they do not produce enough good fruit, then they are thrown away.

But God's rescuing of us, is not conditional… Jesus is not saying that God is like some divine sommelier, and he will test the vintage you produce to see if it's good enough, and if not, then you're thrown out

Now for sure, v6 *is a warning* to anyone who is not yet a Christian, not yet in Jesus, not yet a branch of the true vine

… but friends this is not the point of what Jesus is saying in v2

I repeat, Jesus is not teaching that someone can be a christian for a while, but then their failure to "do enough" means God discards them

How can we be sure?

Well Jesus has already taught how once someone becomes a Christian, they will remain a Christian

… how our salvation, our place in heaven, our eternal life is entirely dependant on what Jesus has done for us

This is perhaps most clear in John chapter 10…

[28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. [30] I and the Father are one."

But this truth is also actually very clear from vv2&3 of chapter 15… once we understand the wordplay at work here

You see, in the original greek, "prune" and "clean" are same word…

… and what this means is that the fruit bearing branches being pruned/cleaned in v2, are the Christian believers *already* pruned/cleaned in v3

and conversely, the non-fruit bearing branches in v2 which are NOT pruned BUT thrown away, are v3, NOT those who have received the word, BUT those who haven't

so if you are a Christian, you are already pruned, because of what Jesus has done… and you will be fruitful, because God is doing all he can to ensure you produce as much fruit as possible!

This is the point of v2… to emphasise the fact that God as the vinedresser is interested in branches that bear fruit!

… His divine agricultural aim is maximum fruit production

God the Father really wants fruitful branches and so to that end, he does all that is necessary to make sure he gets a bumper harvest!

… After all, that is the purpose of planting a vineyard!

I have not met Monsieur Henri Cuchon, but he is the gentleman who owns the vineyards near where we live.. and I'm pretty sure that if i asked him why he planted his vines… why he and his team spend so long pruning them and caring for them, often from dawn til dusk… the answer would be that he does all that… he goes to all that trouble… because he wants them to produce as much good fruit as possible.

So like any vinedresser, God is not interested in unfruitful branches, he throws them away…

…but fruitful ones… branches that are connected to Jesus and so do bear fruit… well God is very interested in them… and so God will prune these branches… why?… because he wants them to be *even more fruitful*

… so then, all Christians are to be in the fruit-bearing business

being a christian and bearing fruit are synonymous - they go hand in hand - 2 sides of the same coin

So just to be clear, in vv2-3 Jesus' aim is not to fill his followers with fear and uncertainty

… but to encourage them and us, that God is hard at work in us to make sure we produce fruit, as he desires!

This was always God's purpose - remember back in Isaiah 5, this was God's purpose for the nation of Israel then… and it is God's purpose for his people now

"ah!… but Andy… that Isaiah vineyard failed… it produced only stink fruit.. What makes you think we will do any better?"

Well there is one crucial difference isn't there?… the christian is not the vine, only a branch!

But we are a branch of the TRUE vine

Jesus is the true vine… and all Christians are branches of this true vine, and we will bear fruit!

Look at verse 5 again… *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit*

and when we do… verse 8… God the father gets the glory

v8… *"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples".*

When i am sitting on my balcony with a bottle of Pinot Noir from Monsieur Cuchon over the road, and I take a sip, I don't say "well done branches"… No I congratulate the farmer

so it is when Christian branches bear much fruit, it is God who deserves the praise

If you are a Christian believer here today, I wonder if you have ever asked yourself this question,

What is God's purpose for my life?

Answer: so that being in Jesus, you can bear much fruit to the glory of God

or how about this one?

I wonder why God was so gracious to little old me?

Answer: so that in Jesus, you can bear much fruit to the glory of God

Friends this is no small matter… in fact, the writer Don Carson goes so far, as to say that,

"Fruitfulness is the infallible mark of true Christianity"

For as Jesus says at the end of v8… bearing fruit to the glory of God, proves that we are his disciples

so what are we to be about as individual Christians?… bearing fruit

and as a church… bearing fruit!

How blessed we are to live in a part of the world with so many vineyards, where everyday we see a visual reminder of what we are to be about as Christians!

Which leaves only one question really and it is this…

How do I as a Christian believer, bear much fruit? What do I have to do?… and what does this fruit look like?

Well the key thing to notice… is that if we are a branch connected to Jesus the true vine… and we want to produce fruit to the glory of God… our focus is not to be on the fruit we produce…

For if we look carefully at what Jesus says, whilst it is true that we are to bear fruit… the way we do that is by abiding in Jesus.

This passage talks a lot about fruit-bearing, that is true.. but the command is for us to abide in… remain in… stick to… focus on… cling to Jesus

so v4 - jesus says abide in me… abide in the vine… abide in me

v5… whoever abides in me

v6… negatively… if anyone does not abide in me

and then in v7… if you abide in me

and vv9 & 10… abide in my love

So our final point is this…

#3 - Jesus produces fruit in Christians who abide in Him

… As christians, the only way we produce fruit to God's glory is by clinging to Jesus

For just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own, it must be in the vine… so the christian must remain in Jesus… and when we do that… it is Jesus who produces the fruit in us!

our focus is to be on our abiding in Jesus…

And we are given 2 clues as to how to do this

First of all **prayerful dependancy**

look with me at v5 - this speaks of the humility required to realise we cannot do this on our own!… we must depend on Jesus

Jesus is not saying we cannot *function* without him, that we cannot brush our teeth, or get dressed or study or go to work… he is not saying we cannot *function*, but that we cannot *fruit*… that as Christians we cannot bear fruit to the glory of God, without him

Now i don't know about you, but in my pride I can so easily read verse 5 as,… *"For apart from me you can do* some *things..* (maybe even)*… lots of things!"*

But v5 is a great antidote to that way of thinking

our fruit-bearing is not about our trying harder… but clinging on more and more to Jesus!

And one way we cling is in prayer…

For prayer is an outworking of our realising… that apart from Jesus… we can do nothing!

As a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, so you and I cannot bear fruit on our own!… and so it is right that we turn to Jesus in prayerful dependance

and so verse 7… Jesus encourages us to pray

But what are we to make of that prayer promise, *"ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*

does it mean that if we pray for a Tesla, then it will appear on our drive the next morning!!

well as tempting as it was to put this to the test, I didn't, because we know that's not what Jesus means!

… we know from what Jesus has already said that this promise must be in the context of bearing fruit, of remaining in Jesus, of glorifying the father

and actually in the first half of verse 7, we see that 2 conditions are given for answered prayer: abiding in Jesus, and his words abiding in believers… and so transforming their thinking.

This promise then, speaks of times when we pray… when we are so saturated in Jesus' words…

… that what he longs for, we pray for..

… what Jesus desires, we ask for

…. to the glory of God the Father

It was JC Ryle I think, who said, *"By his word God discloses his will, and by prayer we ask him to do it"*

Now there is much in the Scriptures to help us, and guide us in our prayers, but at the very least… …As we see here in chapter 15… praying that Jesus would produce much fruit in us, as we abide in him,

… humbly depend on him each day…

… praying that His words would abide in us, and one another… to the glory of God the Father

… seems like a good place to start!

And it is Jesus' words, that ties our prayerful dependancy into the other aspect of abiding, that we read about here… **loving & joyful obedience**…

In v7… Jesus says abide in me, let my words abide in you…

and then v9… abide in my love

How are we to do that?

v10a… if you *keep my commandments* you will abide in my love

This is perhaps the opposite of what we might sometimes think, "*if i can just stay close to Jesus… then i will do what he says"*

*…*but actually Jesus tells us it is the other way round!

Now we must remember… our obedience does NOT make us clean - Jesus does that

… but our obedience does keep us close to him

So v10, Jesus is not saying simply, *"listen to my words… know what i say, comprehend what i say… weigh up what i say… then consider it in the light of your current circumstances, prevailing culture and personal desires, to decide how to respond"*

No

he says that if we love him, we will do what he says

but this is tricky isn't it?… because rule-keeping does not sound very relational?!

"Surely what matters is that I love Jesus", we say

yes of course… but Jesus says that our love for him is shown by how seriously we take what he says!!

… and that pattern is modelled even in the relationship between Jesus and his father (read v10a +b)

So the way to make sure we stay connected to Jesus, is by having his words so engraved on our hearts and minds that obedience to him becomes the most natural thing in the world

It may be perhaps that you feel you are drifting a bit in your christian life… if so, than ask yourself, *is it because you are a little less interested in what Jesus says, a little less radical in doing what he says?*

if you're convicted by something in a sermon on a Sunday… are you still looking to deal with it on a Monday morning?

… If you're challenged by something in your personal bible reading one day, are you still looking to correct it, the next?

Taking seriously what Jesus says, keeps us close to him… and keeping close to him… makes us fruitful… and brings glory to God

For of course when we do obey Jesus' words,

… then unlike the old vineyard in Isaiah, which failed to be fruitful…

… if we obey Jesus words, then we will be

And such a fruitful life attracts others to come to the vine themselves

We can be sure can't we, that if we are not fruitful, people will not be interested… just as if a vineyard is left to rack and ruin… deserted and full of weeds, fruitless - no one will be interested

But when the branches are fruitful, as Jesus promises we will be… then others will be attracted to the one true vine

… all to the glory of God

But there's just one last thing before I finish… you'll notice that I mentioned loving and joyful obedience

Now perhaps we don't naturally associate obedience with joy…

… except maybe with our pet dog??

… and yet it is joyful obedience that Jesus is talking about here

look with me at v11

The Christian who abides in Jesus will not only be dependant on him and obedient to him, but joyfully so!

Jesus tells us we will share in his joy… he will rejoice in us and we will share that rejoicing!

There is no joy in being a compromised Christian, in being a half-hearted Christian

… in wanting *just enough* of Jesus to receive salvation, but *not enough* of Jesus to live with Him as Lord

… being half-hearted is to get the worst of both worlds

For as the old saying goes, *"you know too much of God to enjoy sin, and too much of sin to enjoy God"*

So whilst the evil one will tempt us to think that obedience to Jesus is restrictive, unfair… just plain unnecessary… the reality is that our obedience to Jesus frees us up to become everything that God created us to be

… and our enjoyment of each day is determined by our willingness to allow our lives to be directed by Jesus Christ, the true Vine….

For when Jesus' words abide in us,

… then our desires are conformed to his desires

… our will is conformed to his will

… our likeness is conformed to his likeness

and wonderfully… amazingly… end of v11… his joy becomes our joy

As christians, we produce fruit to God's glory when we abide in Jesus

… prayerful dependancy, and loving, joyful obedience, help us abide in Jesus

Look at Jesus the true vine and you see righteousness and justice and selflessness and humility and obedience to God the Father and true joy

… and by his Spirit, he will produce that same fruit in us as we abide in him

… all to the glory of God