

Trust of the Heavenly Father

29 April, 2018

Reading: John 15:9-17

Open the meaning of the Bible to us in fresh and exciting way through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Being a man, as a general rule, I don't read instruction manuals. I often have to explain to my family why it is far better to spend all morning trying to put the piece of furniture or appliance together, have several bolts and screws left over and have it fall to bits. When you do read the manual, it is amazing how often they tell you to plug the appliance in. Obviously, they get a lot of calls from people who don't plug their new toaster, or hair dryer in and turn it on.

In lots of ways today's Gospel is a bit like that. Common sense really. This saying of Jesus' "I am the vine, when you abide in me you will bear much fruit." When you are plugged in to me, when you are connected. This image would have immediately resonated with Jesus' first audience. Often in Scripture the people of God are described as a vine. Nearly always the reference is to their lack of fruitfulness. Jesus message would have felt like blasphemy especially when he added the word true. "I am the true vine", because in effect he is saying "I am the true Israel." But he has done this before: I am the true drink, I am the true light, I am the true bread, and now, I am the true Israel or vine.

A bit like the instruction manuals, Jesus point is really simple. If you aren't plugged into me, if you aren't connected to me, then don't expect to bear fruit.

It's like my friend who had one of the very first Honda motorcycles. It had an ignition light and a speedo. The manual was very helpful. It stated, "If light no go, bike no go!"

Last week we discovered that the reason the image of the Good Shepherd resonated so much with us is because it's an image of ? who can tell me what the word was? It begins with an I. Yes, that's right, intimacy. So also, today. The image of being connected to the vine through Jesus is a symbol, an image of intimacy.

The biblical word is *abide*. As Jesus abides in the Father, in the same way, when we abide or dwell in Jesus, we abide in God.

The modern equivalent of this connectedness is the plug. We are all used to the fact that if it isn't connected then we can't expect our hair dryer, toaster or TV to go. Equally we need to be connected to other Christians.

It's tempting, isn't it, to think we don't need the church in our lives. In our highly individualistic age, we like to think we can do without other people and with the efforts to get along with them. One worshipper wrote this:

"I think that I shall never see
A church that's all it ought to be
A church whose members never stray
Beyond the straight and narrow way
A church that has no empty pews
Whose vicar never has the blues
A church whose vestry always speak
And none are proud and all are meek
Such perfect churches there may be
But none of them are known to me
But still we'll work and pray and plan
To make our own the best we can."

However flawed and however frustrating, we need the sacraments, we need the sermons, we need the prayers. We need the church.

I have to admit in writing today's sermon I was really drawn to the Acts reading about the Eunuch. That's what people call me in Church, when we pass the peace people come up to me and say "The peace of Christ be with u nick." The same at Communion, "The body of Christ given for u nick."

The image of the vine helps me explain a mystery too. If you have travelled to Central Otago recently, you will have seen the tremendous increase in the number of vineyards. At this time of year, they will be doing all they can to keep the frost off, before the harvest is brought in. It used to puzzle me how planting a vineyard in Central Otago could be profitable at all. Firstly, there is the thin soil that needs breaking in. Then there's the lack of water so irrigation is needed. Thirdly the frosts are something chronic and then there are the rabbits and the birds. All in all, it seems a very un-vineyard sort of place. But then one day I was watching Country Calendar and I learnt a profound truth. The more the vine has to struggle, the better the wine. Hardworking, fighting vines, reaching, clinging, stretching past stubborn rocks to distant water; these are the vintages worth buying. As we struggle in our lives, we become the sort of vintage God has in mind.

In time, our trust of our heavenly Father grows and we come to realise that God only wants the very best for us.

A young man graduated from university. He had his eye on a sports car. And knowing his father could afford it he made his desire clear to him.

At his graduation day the young man looked for signs that dad had got him his sports car. Finally, his father called him over. "I'm so proud of you son," he said, "You're a fine son and I love you very much." and he handed him a beautifully wrapped gift box.

The young man opened the box and inside was a leather-bound Bible with his name embossed in gold. Angrily he yelled at his father, "With all your money you give me a stupid Bible," and he stormed out.

Many years passed. The young man grew older. He was very successful in business, had a beautiful home and wonderful family but he never talked to his father again so angry was he at the miserable gift. Knowing that his father was very old he thought that one day he should visit him. But before he could make amends his father died, leaving all his possessions to his son.

When at the family home he was going through his father's papers and he found the Bible. With tears in his eyes he opened the pages and out dropped a key with the name of the local car dealership on it, it was the key to the car he had wanted and a note from his father saying: Paid in full.

This much and more God loves us.