



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, I am the true vine

St John 15. 1-8

Sunday 28 April

St John in his gospel records the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. Last week we heard Jesus declaring, 'I am the good shepherd'. This week's gospel reading says 'I am the true vine.' These images of Jesus are very powerful, but perhaps 'shepherd' is more easily related to than 'true vine'. In order to appreciate more the significance of this statement, we need to understand how these words would have sounded to Jesus' first listeners.

Today we think of a vine as a source of a rather enjoyable substance, wine. Wine marks a meal or an occasion out as special, and it is to be enjoyed as such. In Jesus' day, wine (and certainly not the quality we expect today) was an everyday drink, a fermented grape juice which was healthier to drink than water. It was also used to cleanse wounds. So, as a means of hydration and an aid to healing, wine was an essential to life. And of course, the fruit of the vine needn't be converted into alcohol!

- What does Jesus' statement mean, if anything, to you today?
- How do you regard vines – an essential or a luxury?
- Would Jesus' listeners have connected with the image?
- Why would Jesus use such an image?
- Is there much difference between views on vines 2000 years ago and now – and what?

Just as Jesus qualified his statement, 'I am the **good** shepherd', so he says that he is the **true** vine. This not just nit-picking over words, but an important distinction. Not all vines are true. Look in gardens today, and the threat of bindweed is a very real and dangerous one. Things which spread and can't be controlled usually cause eventual harm even if initially attractive.

Jesus is saying that the true vine is one that brings good. A vine can be grafted onto and into, so that it may increase and be more fruitful. As the vine, he is the source of life and healing, and from being part of him, the vine, we can further his work. But we're not left to our own devices, and go wild and ineffectual; perhaps even a danger. The Father is the vine dresser, who tends and looks after the well-being of the stock, pruning away that which is diseased or not fruitful.

- In what ways could vines – of whatever kind – be harmful?
- What would you do with a rampant vine?
- Is a vine for a purpose or merely for show?
- How would you react to the idea of being grafted into the vine that is Jesus?
- Can this be possible – and how and why?

This saying of Jesus is not just a picturesque piece of rhetoric, but a divine reality. A vine can bring healing and life as long as it is well-tended and used for its purposes. These include to bear fruit, otherwise there would be absolutely no pint in a vine whatsoever. As St John also records Jesus saying, 'I come so that people may have life, and life in its fullness'. The vine, the true vine is the source of that life, and we are grafted into it and come to share the life of Christ. However, if we come to share the life of Christ, then that means we must also share his purpose.