

## **Jesus the vine: Christian unity and personal fruitfulness**

### **John 15:1-11**

In this passage from John's gospel, Jesus gives us the key to successful living. Of course, success in Jesus' eyes may not look like what we think it should look like. Also, Jesus doesn't call it success, He calls it being fruitful: a life that is lived in such a way that it bears fruit in your life and in the lives of others.

And being the master story teller that he was, Jesus paints a picture here of a vine, like one of the thousands of vines we see around us, and of the vinedresser, the vigneron, who tends and prunes the vine. And from what Jesus says, I want to draw out four simple points that address how we can live fruitful lives as individuals and as churches and how Christian unity can flourish between two churches like ours.

1. Firstly, there is *one* vine. There are lots of different branches, but there is just the one vine. And our unity as Christians together, and the unity we can enjoy between different churches, flows from the fact that we are all rooted into the same stock, we're all grafted into the same vine. There aren't multiples different vines, with the Father, the vigneron, favouring one over the other. There is just the one vine which he tends. And real, genuine, Christian unity flows out of being rooted in that one vine.

But what is that vine? Well, that's the second point.

2. Jesus is the vine. And what Jesus says is that fruitfulness in our lives, living the kind of life that God sees as healthy and fruitful, flows out of us being rooted into Jesus. Now, the hard truth is, that just about everything tries to pull you away from Jesus. It will try and get you to derive your sense of success, or value, or security from other things, like your career or your family, or your relationships. But, Jesus says, it is by abiding, staying close to Him, that we can live truly fruitful lives.

But the same is also true for us as churches, isn't it? You see, it can be incredibly tempting to make something other than Jesus the main thing, and derive our reason for being from something other than the gospel – like family ministry or social awareness or political activism. But Jesus says it's only as we keep him the main thing and stay grafted into him that we can flourish and be fruitful as churches. And it's staying rooted in Jesus, and the gospel, that means that English and Swiss and Dutch and, let's face it, even Americans can fellowship and worship together. And if we lose that connectedness to Jesus, and making him central then we risk being like those branches, separated from the vine, that wither and die.

But it's not just the separated branches that feel some pain.

3. The vigneron, our Heavenly Father, prunes for fruitfulness. When we go through periods of difficulty and trial, we can be tempted to think, 'is God doing this to punish me?' But what Jesus makes clear is that whilst we stay close to Him these times of difficulty are our heavenly Father at work in our lives making us even more fruitful.

4. And fourthly, that fruitfulness –whether it is the fruitfulness of a life lived close to Jesus, or the fruitfulness of Christian unity within and between churches, is not so that we look good, or that we make a name for ourselves, but Jesus says it's for God's glory and for our joy. All the time we live for our own glory, we'll never know real joy, but as we stay close to Jesus, living and bearing fruit for His glory, then we'll know real joy.