



St Matthew's Holland Park Weekly Bulletin 28th April 2024

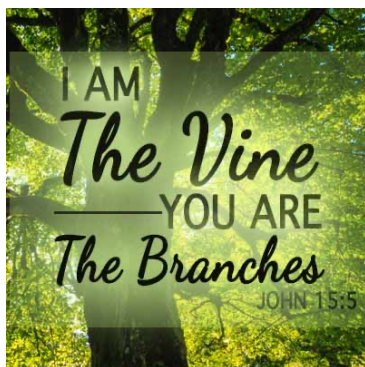
This week's Revd. Morris' message: ***How do we 'abide' in Jesus?***

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the metaphor of Him being the true Vine, God the Father the vinedresser and we being the branches that rely upon His 'sap' for fruitfulness and, indeed, life itself. For, without Him we can do nothing and will be ultimately discarded. Jesus then ***commands us to love one another as He loves us*** - unconditionally and sacrificially. *How can we mere humans love in this way?* Jesus answers that ***we can only love like this if we 'abide in Him'***. So, what does it mean to *abide in Jesus*?

Scholars discern **3 aspects to this 'abiding'** [literally meaning 'to live, continue, or remain with someone'] namely, being **connected** to Jesus, **depending** upon and **remaining** with Him. To be **connected to Jesus**, you must have first believed in Him, have accepted His Gospel and formed a real, personal relationship with Him. Jesus promises to come to you if you ask. Once invited by you, **God the Holy Spirit lives ['dwells, abides'] in your heart** [See John 14:17.]

We **depend upon Jesus** when we trust Him and seek to **live in His Grace** rather than in our own strength. How do we do this? Firstly, *Jesus asks us for His words to abide in us* [John 15:7] We can't bear spiritual fruit [such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control - see Galatians 5:22 and 23] unless we are depending upon His Grace and the Holy Spirit. We ask Him that His way for us minute by minute is made clear to us, that we have the heart to trust Him, listen for His words and obey them. His words may then come to us directly into our hearts, through Bible reading, prayer, the counsel of others or providential circumstances.

Secondly, *Jesus also asks us to abide (or live) in His love.* [John 15:9 and 10] This involves our wills and means that we should seek to obey His Scriptural commandments as well as the day to day gentle nudges and directions of His *still small voice* in our own hearts. This also involves seeking to maintain a tender conscience, not living in continual un-repented sin or regularly choosing a way of action that is not of love in our decisions and relationships.



As we do these 2 things, in God's good time, we become more like Jesus and more and more His spiritual sap is able to give us His Joy, His power to love others as He does and to so enliven us that His fruit becomes more and more manifest in our day to day lives. Trying to be fruitful apart from Grace will only lead to frustration, physical and spiritual exhaustion as this approach only blocks the flow of the Grace [Jesus' sap] into our lives. As Jesus says, the branch can't bear fruit by itself [v 4]

Finally, we are invited to **remain [or 'move in'] with Jesus**. This includes trusting that His way is best for us, continuing and persevering with following Jesus - even when times get tough. It also means making Jesus the centre of your life. An analogy to this aspect of abiding is *when you fall in love*. The loved one becomes the most important person in your life. You can't wait to spend time with them and talk to them. You can no longer just

decide what you will do on your own ... you need to see what they wish to do and work in with them. Their views are of paramount importance and you long to please them as much as possible. When you remain or live with someone, you need to jointly plan your lives together and not just go off on your own agenda.

So then, who are **these dead branches** in this metaphor? Most scholars believe that the dead branches are those who appear to be members of the faith community but in fact are *merely nominal*. They have no relationship, dependence nor continuance with Jesus. As an example, Peter sought to abide with Jesus, Judas did not; yet both were Jesus' Disciples.

So, is this 'abiding' an all or nothing thing? No. I suspect most of us may struggle at times with surrendering our lives to Jesus' will, have doubts, fall into sin and error and try to do stuff *for God* in our own strength rather than *as prompted by Him, with Him and in His Grace*. But, thank God, if we believe in Jesus our salvation is sure and doesn't rely upon the measurement of our good and bad works! [Ephesians 2:8 and 9]. Jesus is inviting us to abide in Him - and the more that we do so, the more fruitful we become. But Jesus also warns that ***we all will still need the odd painful pruning from time to time to remove bad habits and attitudes that creep in*** - but gardeners tell us that pruning is necessary in order to increase fruitfulness. Therefore, this is a lifelong journey of maturation for us all - to discover our true selves as we are pruned and grow more and more like Him.

So, in this Fifth Sunday of Easter, I wonder ***what may need a little pruning in your life this week?*** **Gospel reading: John 15:1-18**

Some resources to dig deeper: <https://www.gotquestions.org/abide-in-Christ.html> ; <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-does-it-mean-to-abide-in-christ.html> ; <https://www.gotquestions.org/indwelling-of-the-Holy-Spirit.html> ; <https://www.gotquestions.org/by-grace-through-faith.html>

Upcoming Parish Activities: **Mid Week Eucharist** - Tuesday 11:30am Marshall Schatz's funeral; Wednesday 10:30 a.m.; 6:30p.m **Meditation Group**; Thursday 7am **Men's Breakfast**; **This and next Sunday** Guitars and Ukulele lessons 3p.m. **Next Sunday's Readings:** *Margaret* - Acts 10:44-48; Ps 98; *Clyda*- 1 John 5:1-12; John 16:16-24

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Parish Private Facebook site : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/292308270851142> ; **Public**

Site: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556418523933>

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY:

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Turrbal and Jagera Peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather today. We acknowledge their continued spiritual connection to country and surrounding land, sky and water. We pay our respect to their Elders, past present and emerging and pray that we may continue to learn from and nurture one another in the spirit of Reconciliation.

