

# Sermon for Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024

## Easter 5

By Rev Janet Bayly

### Gospel Reading:

John 15:1-8

*'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>3a</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because*



*of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*<sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

### Sermon

Are you impetuous or measured? Decisive or a procrastinator? Do you rush in or stand back and think about things?

I suppose we are a mixture of both depending on the circumstances. If there was a dangerous situation most of us would react quickly and decisively. Did you catch the story in the news of the six year old little girl who was playing outside and her mum and siblings were asleep on the settee. The girl saw flames coming from the top of the house and without thinking, ran inside to wake her mum, saving all their lives. Spur of the moment reaction. But what are you like buying clothes, planning a holiday, organising a party? Do you launch yourself into it or spend a great deal of time pondering? I tend to plunge in but David is definitely more measured especially when buying clothes!

Many of us here are keen gardeners and wanting to grow the best vegetables and flowers. We want our gardens to express our love and care. So we take time slowly and carefully preparing the ground and getting the best seeds and plants. But sometimes we have to bring out the weapons of mass destruction. The secateurs. We need to act decisively. That bush is dead, so needs to be cut down. That shrub is completely overgrown, so it needs a heavy prune. And then we know that next year it will thrive and produce a much better crop. But it takes courage to trim and cut back.

This brings us to our gospel reading. Israel was and is a good place to plant a vineyard. It took a lot of preparation of the land, but the rewards were great. Grapes and wine were enjoyed and were a sign of success and wealth. People in Jesus time were very familiar with vineyards. They knew that they had to be tended carefully and guarded daily against vandals and robbers. So, it is not surprising that yet again Jesus chose this everyday sight and experience to teach his disciples a deep spiritual lesson. He started as he often did from their everyday experiences. Vines, grapes and vineyards.

In John's gospel there are seven I am sayings of Jesus and each one comes from his listeners everyday life - shepherds and sheep fold, gates, bread, water and vines. On one level his followers would have been able to identify with what he was telling them. But Jesus always wanted to lead people into deeper truths and understanding of God's love and purpose for their lives. Taking them from where they were to a new place nearer to their Heavenly Father. So here Jesus says: I am the true vine, and my father is the vine grower. From the familiar to the spiritual. You can almost see Jesus' listeners scratching their heads. What does he mean? Then Jesus speaks of pruning and cutting down and even burning dead branches. Slowly and gently, Jesus leads his followers into the truths of what it means to be a disciple. They and we must be joined to him if we are to grow and flourish in our Christian lives. He wanted them and us to bring forth spiritual fruit. Love, patience kindness and compassion. In his measured way Jesus was guiding and leading his disciples but warning also them that they might need a bit of pruning! I wonder if we need pruning. Are there things in our lives that need trimming back or getting rid of altogether? Maybe we need to ponder!

Our reading from Acts was a contrast. It was full of impetuosity decisiveness and speed. An angel told Philip to get up and go and he went. Then he was told to join the chariot that the Eunuch was travelling in. He had to run to catch it up. He took the opportunity straight away to explain the good news of Jesus prophesied in Isaiah. It was then the eunuch's turn to be impetuous. What is to prevent me from being baptised in that water over there. And Philip baptised him and then he dashed off somewhere else. This all feels at break neck speed, but Philip was so

tuned in to the Holy Spirit that he just reacted and made a difference in that man's life.

Sometimes in our lives things happen and we react instantly. Maybe it is something we have chosen to do, maybe it's in response to a question or situation. At other times we have the opportunity to reflect and ponder. Both have a place as we grow in our relationship with Jesus and as he leads us into different ways of thinking and being. Sometimes we need pruning to be more fruitful in our life. At other times we need a big nudge from the Holy Spirit to get moving and make a difference. May we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we seek to follow Jesus and witness to his grace and mercy in our lives. Amen