

“Abiding in Christ”

First Reading

John 15:1-8 (NLT)

“Remaining in Jesus, the True Vine”

Second Reading

John 15:9-17 (NLT)

Christmas is just around the corner. Just 7 weeks away.

We all know that the final week before Christmas is not the time to visit a shopping centre.

Now think back to a time when you went into a crowded place when you were a small child.

When I was little and then again when my own children were small and when we visited “The Ekka”, the first thing said was,

“Stay close to me and hold my hand all the time. We won’t get separated if you hold on to each other.”

As Jesus prepared his disciples for a life without his visible presence he impressed on them the importance of stay close to him spiritually.

If you want the key to spiritual growth you will find it in John 15.

In John 14 Jesus comforted his disciples. He gave them an absolute assurance that he would always be with them.

In John 15 Jesus speaks to them of the importance of remaining in him. That’s the other side of the coin to Jesus remaining with us.

To be fruitful and fulfilled Jesus remains with us and we are to remain in him.

These two chapters in John are like a pigeon pair. What Jesus will do and what we should do.

Jesus uses the example of fruitful grapevine branches which bear huge bunches of delicious grapes because they are attached to the vine trunk.

The branches produce fruit because they remain in the vine.

If we want to be people whose lives are filled with the Spirit of Christ; lives that reflect Jesus power at work in us we need to remain grafted to Jesus the vine.

The fruitfulness will be seen in the life marked by: love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Charles Spurgeon the great English preacher of the 18th century wrote, "The total inability of us as sinners, makes saving grace absolutely necessary for the beginning, the progress, and the completion of the fruitful Christian life"

John Calvin the great reformed preach of Luther's time said, "We will produce no good fruit unless God continues his work of grace within us."

Suppose there is a person who is an "Ice Addict". In his own strength he cannot break free of his addiction.

But now suppose a strong, loving and lovely friend rescues him by taking him off the streets and into his own home we he begins to recover.

But then the addicted man returns to the streets.

He will in all likelihood return to his former situation.

Just so, we need to remain close to Jesus our strong, loving and lovely friend.

In John 15: 14, Jesus calls us his friends.

Let's return to the image of the vine for a moment.

There are two types of vine branches on a grape vine. Ones that bear much fruit and others which grow amongst those branches but don't bear any fruit.

The ones that bear fruit are pruned so they grow even more fruit. The ones that bear no fruit are "Lifted Up (Greek)" away from the vine.

In the parable of the soils we can see three types of people who are lifted away and thrown away.

Those who refuse to listen to Jesus. (Matt 13: 4)

Those who render Jesus lip-service only. (Matt 13:5,6)

Those who listen and begin to follow but when hard times come they abandon Jesus. (Matt 13: 7)

As fruitful branches Jesus wants us to abide in him so that we bear even more fruit to his glory. (Matt 13:8)

We have Jesus promise in John chapters 14 and 15 that he will never leave us.

Our part is to abide in him and allow his Spirit the opportunity to transform us.

There are some very practical ways to become more fruitful.

Let's consider some of these using the simple acrostic D.I.S.C.I.P.L.E.

Daily Bible reading: Hebrews 4:12

Intentional Daily Prayer: Colossians 4:2

Sunday worship each week: Exodus 20:8

Christian Community, being in a small group: Acts 2:46

Involvement both in and outside the church community in service: 1 Corinthians 12:12

Purposeful giving of the tithe: Malachi 3:10

Leading others to Christ: Matthew 28:19,20

Enjoying God's gift of life Philippians 4:4

One of the blessing that comes from remaining in Jesus is that he answers our prayers and gives us the things we ask for.

There is a proviso on which answered prayer hinges. It is the key to an effective prayer life. Effective prayers only happen as we remain in Jesus.

Look at John 14: 13 and John 15: 7-8

As we abide in Jesus more and more we will grow to desire the things Jesus desires and pray accordingly.

As we abide in Jesus more and more we will want God to be glorified in everything we ask for.

Now there is one negative in remaining in Jesus.

John talks about it in John 15:18-25 and John 16:1-4.

As followers of Jesus we can expect to be persecuted by those who reject Jesus.

As John 15 closes, Jesus draws the disciples' attention back to the promise he made in John 14; we will not be left as Orphans. We have his promise of an eternal home.

We should always remember that the power in Jesus life while he walked among us was his daily contact with his heavenly father.

Again and again he withdrew to a solitary place to be with him.

Jesus has promised to remain with us always. Friends and loved ones will come and go. There will always be hellos and goodbyes.

If we are to experience his abiding presence in our daily life and know the victory that he has promised we will want to remain in him, confident and content in his promise to be with us always.