



**Date :** 29 April 2018  
**Series :** Life from the Vine  
**Preacher :** Revd Anders Litzell  
**Readings :** 1John 4:7-12

Psalm : 22:26-32

John 15:1-8

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Let's cut straight to the chase – there are so many things to say about this passage, and how the word “remain” carries this deep theme that runs throughout the Gospel of John culminating in this passage that we could be here all day (which would be fun, by the way) – but I am only going to state a few facts:

- 1) Jesus is going wild about what it is “to remain” in Him; he uses the word 11 times here!
  - a. Remain in me
  - b. I remain in you
  - c. A branch must remain in the vine
  - d. You cannot bear fruit unless you remain in the vine
  - e. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit
  - f. If you do not remain in me, you will be like a withered branch
  - g. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you – ask whatever you wish and it shall be given
  - h. Remain in my love
  - i. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love
  - j. I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love

And after this long repetitive string of encouraging – nay, exhorting – his disciples to remain in Him; he gives just one command for the single purpose of remaining in him: He says if you keep my commands you will remain in my love; and my new commandment is this:

Love one another.

Ag, man! Could He not have said, pray 5 times before noon? That's so much easier!

Love one another!?

What kind of a commandment is that? But more to the point – why is THIS the answer to remaining in Jesus?

He says over and over “remain in me, remain in me, remain in me” in 9 different ways; and the tenth and eleventh are his saying: if you keep my command you will remain in my love – and this is my command: love one another.

So in fact, loving one another is not a thing we do TO remain in Jesus – loving one another IS TO remain in Jesus. Loving one another is not a stepping stone on our way to a closer walk with Jesus; loving one another is the destination; loving one another is the destination, the place where we can remain in Christ's presence, joined to Him forever; because Jesus says through this nifty little Greek grammar thing that English doesn't have: “this is how I am continuously present, continuously remaining in my Father's love”.

So Jesus says “this is how you remain in my love”. Love one another.

And because this tends to get a bit heavy-going to think about – let's do exactly what Jesus did – let's use an analogy; let's use the picture of the vine.

I'm sure you've all been to wine farms more times than I can shake a stick at, so I'm not going to try to explain how vines work – beyond a few basics that I believe are within even my grasp:

Each branch is joined to the root and EVERYTHING that the branch needs, apart from sunlight and air, comes through the root. This root the sole source of life for the branch. In both modern and ancient viticulture, that is the art of vine-growing, it is common practice to have a strong and vital root onto which other types of grape-bearing branches are grafted: that is cut off from one plant and put into the new root by a cut being made in the root, and the cut-off branch squeezed into this cut and bound together tightly – until the healing power of the sap eventually forms a single vine out of the two and the new branch receives its life from the new root, and begins to bear fruit.

There are a lot of images we can pick up on here – such as being branches who have been saved from our lives that were leading to hopelessness because we had only ourselves to rely on and our own roots were shallow, and the soil in which we were planted – this world tainted by sin and death – could never nourish us. Yet by the grace of God, we have been saved – cut off by the Father's gentle hand from our old ways of life and grafted into the root of Jesus, planted with roots in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another image is that the fruit-bearing branches of a vine do not grow from the root. Let me say that again – the fruit-bearing branches of a vine do not grow from the root; they grow from other branches called Cordons, which are long-running branches from which the smaller fruit-bearing branches shoot. If we piggy-back onto St Paul's image of the Body of Christ, we see how each branch is fulfilling its role according to its purpose to bring about fruit. But also, and this is very important, we; you and I are connected to Jesus through other people. Let's not take this image so far as to make this an issue of salvation, because by God's Grace alone were we saved from our own old root and grafted into Christ – but now that we ARE in Christ, and dependent on Him alone for our flourishing as human beings and our bearing fruit for the Kingdom of Heaven – we are entirely dependent on receiving the sap from the root, and to receive the sap from the root our connection to the rest of the vine is essential!

If the branch, through which the sap from the root reaches me, has been broken by someone passing by – and that break has not yet been healed by our Father, the vine dresser, then that is going to affect my bearing fruit. If I as a branch have an injury or a parasite growing on me, then that is going to limit both the fruit I bear and any branches connected to me.

The good news is this: it is impossible for a healthy branch, that is a branch without injury, to bear fruit. The second bit of good news is this, God is an AMAZING vine-dresser with endless imagination and creativity for restoring branches to flourishing ranging from supporting weaknesses to binding up breaks to re-grafting us in a different place on the vine.

In all things, the essence of our Father's work is to bring healing and wholeness so that we can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. For in this image, the sap is the Holy Spirit. Just like the sap brings all the strength, healing and nourishment from the root to the branch so that, out of the overflow of the riches of the sap, the branch can bear fruit; likewise the Holy Spirit brings all the strength, healing

and nourishment from the Father's heart to us, so that we can bear fruit out of the overflow of His love.

Also just like the branch knows that it remains a part of the root, because of the constant flow of the sap, so we know, like 1 John said today, "This is how we know that we remain in Him, and He in us; He has given us of His Spirit".

Have you ever tried to water your garden only to notice that there is no water, because there is a kink in the hose – or worse yet, a leak? That is what our lives are like as Christians when we have damaged relationships with other people – especially with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ; like a kink on the garden hose; like a gash on the cordon that connects us to the Root, to Jesus, that is leaking sap, stopping our bearing fruit.

So this isn't a simple 'yes-or-no' scenario, where we are either connected to the root, or not: there is always some work of healing to be done – and even the branches that do bear fruit, our Father prunes so that it may bear more fruit; cutting off parts of our life and work that is either fruitless, or hindering greater fruit-bearing somewhere else.

As a congregation, we are a fruit-bearing branch; therefore, by definition, this branch called St Elizabeth's is under the Father's pruning. "My Father is the vine-dresser" says Jesus. No-one can question the fruit that has come through this congregation; yet I doubt that anyone among us would say that we are, in this present moment, bearing the fullest, richest most comprehensive fruit for the Kingdom of God that we ever could. Some of us look back to greater days and, I hope and trust, all of us look forward to greater things yet to come – I know I certainly do! Our greatest time is yet ahead of us!

And the first step is ensuring that we are connected to the Vine, without let or hindrance – that every crack and gash on the stem is repaired.

One great way to grow in love in the congregation, is to be part of a small group that meets regularly for fellowship and prayer. Home groups, or house groups, or life groups or cell groups – or whatever you want to call them: in Sweden we have a saying "a child, who is loved, has many names" – these groups are a fantastic way to both grow together as the Body of Christ, and to be deliberate about our becoming more like Jesus as His disciples and this week I have written to the leaders of our small groups to say I would love to come and visit each of them! We have a handful of these groups but since I arrived quite a few people have come and talked to me to say "I would like to be part of a group like this as well" – enough people that I think we need to start one or two more.

So if that's you, whether you've mentioned it to me already, or you're just hearing about this now, or maybe you're just curious to know more, please would you come and tell me, so we can make a plan: Grab me after the service, send me an email, call Dawne in the office – any way is a good way !