

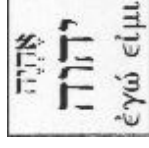
relationships – one vertical, our relationship with God, the other horizontal, our relationship with others. Both relationships are to be characterised by love. It is through the cross – the sacrificial death of Jesus – that both relationships can be restored. The key is the death and risen life of Jesus, active in our life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the promised Counsellor.

- In what ways has the thought of Jesus as the true Vine been significant for us in our Christian life?
- “In me – much fruit! Apart from me – nothing!” Reflect on that from our own experience.

### For the people of our day ...

Discovering our secret powers, not spiritual poverty, asserting ourselves, not submission to God or anyone else... these are the driving goals of many people today. Where is the place for Jesus, the true Vine?

- How would Australians respond to the idea of Jesus as “the true Vine”?
- What associated ideas are there in the Australian culture that would help to communicate this teaching about Jesus?



## 6. The True Vine



Four years of my boyhood were spent in Stanthorpe. A beautiful place with a bracing climate, it is conspicuous for its granite outcrops. We hadn't heard of the formations now known as Girraween National Park – it was just private property. Other much lesser satisfied our boyish energy.

Returning later as minister and family, we were introduced, not only to Girraween, but to other features which were now publicly available. I recall our first visit to Donnelly's Castle. We turned left at Thulimbah the sign said “Pashendale”. We followed the road to a dirt road with a sign, “Zanatta & Sons Biltmore Cellars”. Half a mile further, a track went to the right skirting around the property. Eventually we came to a sign that pointed to a picnic area, “Donnelly's Castle”.

Do we do that as a Church – put up a sign which is only visible if you know how to get there?

- How would Australians respond to the idea of Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life”?
- What associated ideas are there in the Australian culture that would help to communicate this teaching about Jesus?

Today we are thinking about our source of life – in Christ, the true Vine.

### The Situation in Jesus' Time

In John 14 we note that Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he no longer be physically present with them. Nevertheless, he affirmed, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

It is in this context of his physical absence that he gave the promise of “another Counsellor” - the Holy Spirit. It would be through the Spirit's ministry that they would experience the reality of his life within them (vv.20,23) and know the truth of what he has taught them (v.26). They would indeed know peace and comfort (v.27).

We note that the chapter finishes with the words, “Come now; let us leave” (v.31). Three chapters later we read, “When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley” (18.1). Writers have assumed either that the rest of the discourse including the prayer took

**Study 7: “The ‘I Am’ ”** – Reading: John 8.48-59

place in the shadows on the way to Gethsemane, or that the words of Jesus marked the intention to leave the upper room and he continued to speak during their preparations to depart.

**Reading: John 15.1-8**

Leon Morris helpfully comments “The allegory of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result, not of human achievement, but of abiding in Christ. There is a stern side to this. Branches which are not fruitful are purged out. Jesus is not simply issuing some comforting advice. He is outlining the difficult, but important way of service. There seems little doubt that Jesus has in mind passages in the Old Testament which regard Israel as a vine (Ps.80.8-16; Is.5.1-7; Jer.2.21; Ezek.15; 19.10; Hos.10.1). ...[Jesus] is the ‘true’ vine. As we have seen, the vine is often the symbol of Israel, and this adjective may point to Israel as a degenerate vine (Jer.2.21), now replaced by the true. In a way characteristic of the Fourth Gospel there is an immediate reference to the Father. Father and Son are never regarded as separate entities each going His way regardless of the other. John sees them at work together. So when he reports Jesus as speaking of Himself as the true vine he immediately goes on to the thought that the Father is the vine-dresser.”

- What are some of the qualities of the vine that make it a particularly apt illustration of the truth Jesus is teaching here?
- Reflect on the words “cuts off” and “prunes”.

The branch is dependent on its relationship with the vine if it is to bear grapes. It is the life-force (the sap) flowing through it that produces the fruit. Jesus insists that it is his life within us that enables us to bear fruit. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much, fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (v.5; note the complementary truth of Phil.4.13). He also sees this continuing relationship as the key to answered prayer – “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you” (v.7). Leon Morris comments, “If a man is truly abiding in Christ then his prayers will certainly be ‘in the name’ of Christ, *i.e.* in accordance with all that Christ stands for. And if he is really abiding in Christ he will live in obedience to the words of Christ... When the believer abides in Christ and Christ’s words abide in him then he lives as close to Christ as well may be. Then his prayers will be prayers that are in accord with God’s will and they will be fully answered.”

It is for fruitfulness that the branches exist, not decoration! “This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (v. 8). Leon Morris comments that “discipleship is not static, but a growing and developing way of life. Always the true disciple is becoming more fully a disciple.”

- What does Jesus mean when he calls himself “the true Vine”?
- What does it mean to “remain” in him?
- What is the “fruit” that Jesus expects us to bear?

In answer to our last question, Leon Morris believes that “we need not doubt that the qualities of Christian character are in mind as elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt.3.8; 7.20; Rom.6.22; Gal.5.22; Eph.5.9; Phil.1.11, etc.).”

**Reading: John 15.9-17**

When Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5.22) he places “love” and “joy” at the head of the list. Here Jesus focuses on these two qualities. The Source and inspiration of our love is his love, expressed supremely in his self-giving for us on the cross. It is striking that it is when we obey his commands that we remain in his love. Jesus wants complete joy for us, but it is in obeying his commands that we experience it. And his key command at this point is that we have love for one another.

- Reflect on the prayer of Jesus in 17.20-23.

True love expresses itself in service – even to the point of laying down one’s life (v. 13). Leon Morris comments “In the context this must refer primarily to the love of Jesus as shown in the cross. Here He laid down His life on behalf of His friends. Some have raised the question whether the love that dies for enemies is not greater than that which is concerned for friends. But that is not before us here. In this passage Jesus is not comparing the love which sacrifices for enemies with that which sacrifices for friends. He is in the midst of friends and is speaking only of friends... When it is a question of enemies Christ in fact did die for them (Rom. 5.10).”

**Applying it all to ourselves**

The cross consists of two pieces of wood – one vertical and one horizontal. This has often been used as a symbol of the Christian life (even as it is also a source of that life). The Christian life embodies two