

Vine and branches

Jesus gives his disciples much comfort, and also warnings and promises in these words of farewell in John's gospel spoken to his disciples shortly before the crucifixion. If we are also following Jesus, His words apply equally to us.

Icebreaker question: Is there a particular occasion of farewell on moving or retirement or similar which has stuck in your mind? Why was it memorable?



Read John 17:1-17

Grape vines need pruning not only in winter, but also throughout the year to ensure a healthy plant growing in the right place and producing fruit. Vine-dressing is a skilled job.

- What main feeling or overall impression do you get from this passage?
- Who is represented by the main vine? And the branches? And the gardener?
- Bearing in mind also Matt's recent preaching on our mission and vision – what do you think the fruit might be?
- The words used for prune and clean are similar in Greek. In what circumstances might our individual lives need skilled pruning? And our church life?

Pruning means change of shape and direction and change may not be comfortable for us.

- What consequences does Jesus warn of here? (v4-6)
- What main instructions or commands does Jesus give? Are they related?
- Describe the relationships between God and Jesus, and between Jesus and his disciples (us).
- What promises does Jesus make about prayer? Fruit? What do you think these mean?
- What are the main ideas you want to remember and apply from what we have read?

In deeper

The prophecies of Isaiah were spoken in a time when God's people were not faithful and God allowed enemy armies to defeat them and eventually take them into exile as judgement.

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

- In this prophesy who do you think are the vines and vineyard? The owner? And the tricky one – who might be speaking as 'I'?
- What is the main complaint against God's people?
- What consequence is described? What might this mean in real life for the people of Isaiah's time?
- Do you think this prophesy says anything about God's plan for Jesus and his disciples?

Psalms 80 was likely written much earlier than the prophesy in Isaiah 5 but reading prophesy (and this psalm does contain prophesy) is a bit like watching a movie with flash-backs and flash-forwards.

Psalm 80:7-19

- Who is the vine in this passage? What story in Israel's history is referred to?
- What has gone wrong? Why? (The passage from Isaiah might help here.)
- What hope are people holding onto? What do they ask?
- What might this Psalm say about Jesus? And about God's plan for those who follow Jesus and for the kingdom?