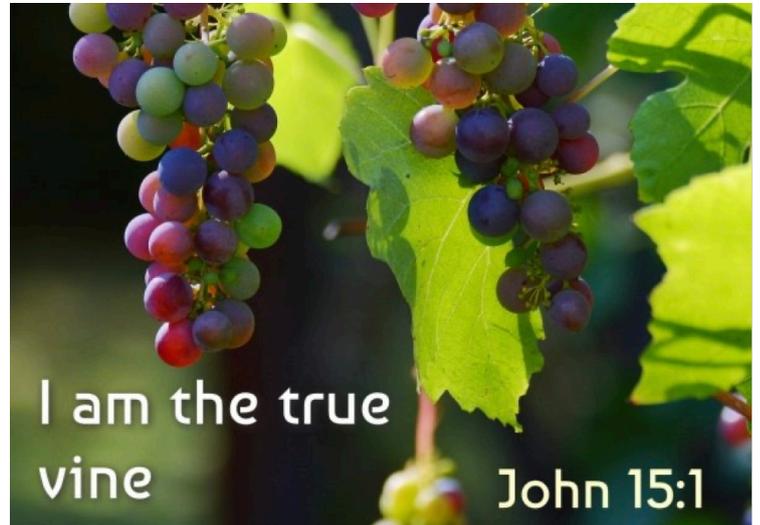




the bridge lectionary reflections 2021

MAY

Reflections from Rev Penny Worth

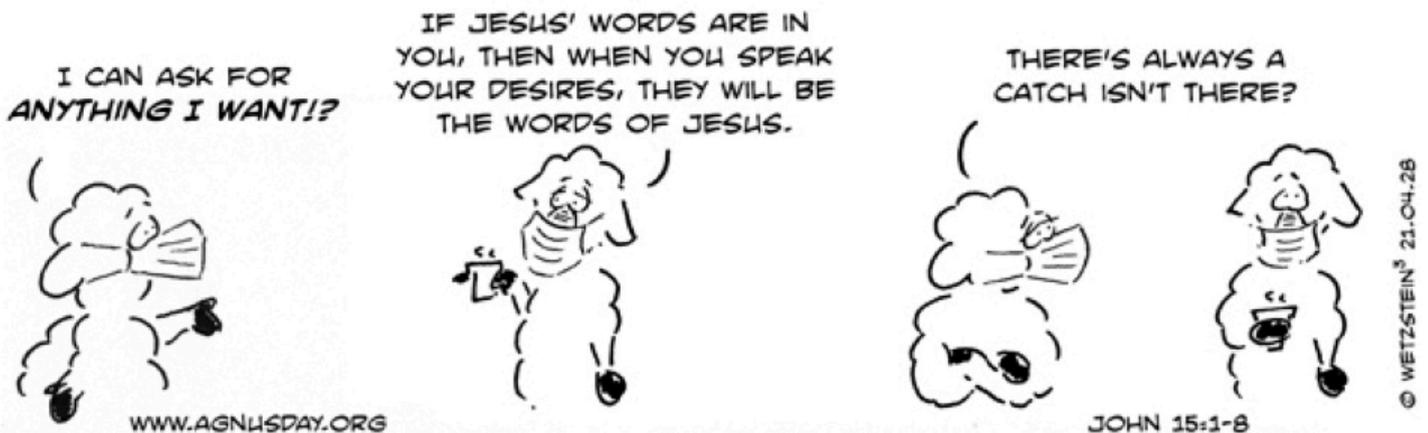


2 May John 15:1-8

“Strong and independent woman” is a catchphrase in our family, so that if one of the men offers to help when my daughter or I are struggling with some physical task, the expected answer is, “No thanks, I’m being a strong and independent woman”. I was brought up to take a pride in being independent and capable and that has stayed with me. Many of you will have similar attitudes. But how does this work out in our relationship with God in Christ? I think such attitudes are at the root of my resistance to this image of vine and branches. I don’t want to be ‘just a branch’; I don’t want to be tied down and tied in, and I certainly don’t want to be pruned!

But there are other ways to think about it aren’t there? ‘Abide in me as I abide in you’ implies mutuality. I can do nothing apart from the vine - in fact I will die if I don’t stay connected - but the vine can’t bear any fruit without its branches. This reminds us of the other side of the coin: as the prayer says, ‘You have no hands and feet in the world today but ours’.

I do need to learn dependence on God, and I would be a better Christian if that trust and dependence were greater, but as in every relationship we need to get the balance right. It is only when I am connected, rooted and utterly secure in God (or Jesus, or Christ, if you prefer) that I have the strength, courage and independence to step out and take risks.



9 May John 15:9-17

There's a very strong and striking claim here in v. 9 when you think about it: that the relationship between God and Jesus is equivalent to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, and because we are also disciples, that includes us! We can see how that might be the case in some ways – God shares his divine nature with Jesus, we share our human nature with Jesus; God is present in Jesus in some way, Jesus is present in us in some way. Still, it's a bit mind boggling when we see how close is the relationship between God and his 'only son', to think that Jesus is that close to us.

But of course, it is the strength of our connection with Jesus that allows us to continue this cascade of love and meet the very demanding ask that we love others as he has loved us. Self-giving is the hallmark of divine love – does our loving stand up to scrutiny?

16 May John 17:6-19

This is a complicated and repetitive passage! The words that keep cropping up are "world" and "word". Jesus is saying that although the disciples are in the world, they don't belong to the world, they belong to God. This is another way of saying the disciples are in the kingdom of God. Their primary allegiance is not to a political system, or to earthly things, but to God and God's way of doing things. The disciples have kept God's word (v6).

This is the link between "world" and "word": if we keep God's word, that is, obey his rules, treat God as "king", do things his way, then we are not of this world, but in God's kingdom. To be in God's kingdom is the same as having eternal life. It's about a relationship with God where God is at the centre of our lives.

Are you in the kingdom of God?

Nobody could say it was easy to always do things God's way, but we know what happens in the continuation of the story: the disciples fail very badly, all deserting Jesus, and yet, he not only forgives them, but trusts them to continue God's mission to save the world. There's hope for us all!

23 May Pentecost Acts 2:1-21

It's striking in this passage how much space is given to describing the crowd's reaction to this event. They start off bewildered, but move on to being either amazed, astonished and perplexed, or to sneering that the disciples are drunk.

God is doing something new here and nobody understands, but some of these religious people (for they are all Jews) just dismiss what they don't understand, while others are open to something new, they wait to learn more, they listen to God speaking through Peter. Of these two contrasting responses which is the group that God can work with to create the church, the beginnings of the kingdom on earth?

As we come out of the pandemic and we rebuild our society, are we open to God doing new things – new things in the world, new things in the church, new things in our lives? Our human nature is such that we tend to want things to be the same, we want safe and familiar, but as on the day of Pentecost, God might be after something better and he might need our help.

30 May John 3:1-17

Today is Trinity Sunday, so we have a passage that mentions Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the trinity tells us to believe both that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and that God is one. In logical terms, or even in terms of the way we usually use language, that is nonsense, of course, so the teaching is telling us that God is beyond our words, our language and our understanding. It also tells us that one image of God won't do and that multiple, varied images get us closer to understanding what God is like.

Verse 16 is well loved because it gives us an image of how much God loves us – we have some idea of the cost of giving up an only child, but it wouldn't do without the idea of the trinity in the background. If we let Father and Son separate, then god uses someone else to save the world and that is a sub-Christian view of God. The point of the crucifixion is that God gives himself – all he has and is - for the sake of the world and it's that self-giving that makes our God worth worshipping, so perhaps we should stick with the doctrine of the Trinity!

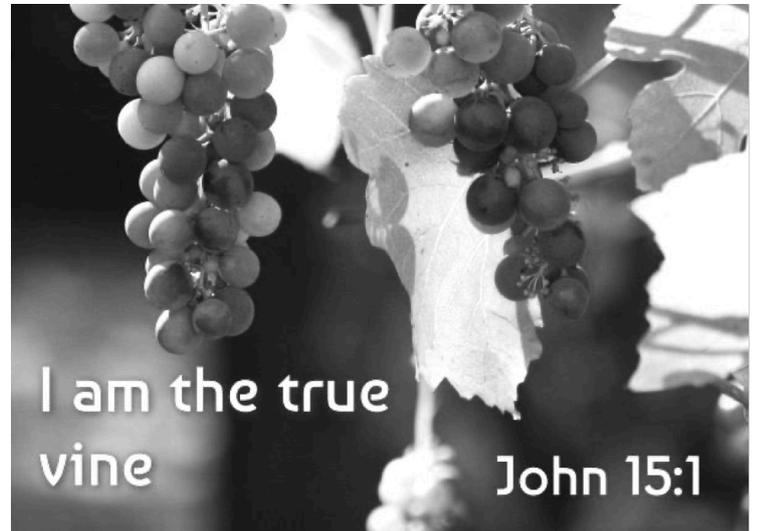




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