

“Remain in me”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read John 15:1-5

If you can, watch the YouTube video: https://youtu.be/CJPUSAAkq_w

John 15 is one of a number of chapters that records the words spoken by Jesus to his disciples on the night before he was crucified. The preceding chapter suggests to us that their hearts were troubled, and as we read these words in the shadow of an ongoing pandemic, we can draw encouragement through recognising that Jesus has something to say to troubled people. He speaks of himself as a vine and his followers as the branches. He speaks of the Father as a gardener who cuts and prunes those branches. Events in recent months might well have felt like a “pruning” for us, as much that was familiar has been cut away. As we acknowledge this, we might draw some insight and encouragement by reflecting on these words of Jesus. In particular you are invited to consider three questions:

What do I need to let go of? When plants are pruned, this is because it is necessary for their wellbeing for some things to be cut away. Recent circumstances might have been dramatic and unexpected, but what do we need to be content to release, and what truly matters in what remains? Once branches are cut off, there is no point in clinging on to them - the future lies in what remains rooted. What does it mean for each of us to stay rooted in Christ in these challenging times?

What might God's purpose be? The Father is described as a gardener, someone who does not prune the plant for the sake of it, but with a purpose. Rather than speculating on the cause of recent events, we can focus on the certainty that God has a purpose for his people. This is true for each of us. Sometimes God's purpose can be accomplished through events and sometimes by remaining strong in the face of them. It is important that we seek God in every circumstance, including all that is happening at the present time. Questions we might consider are: What is God's purpose for my life? What is God's purpose for his church? What is God's purpose for our world.? How can we play our part in pursuing God's purposes and not just be driven along by agendas of our own making?

How can I remain fruitful? Grapevines are not the most attractive of plants, they are grown for their fruit. What are the fruits that God desires of us? There are several places in our Scriptures that answer this question in general terms – as well as reflecting on these, we might also consider what this means for us as individuals. What is the fruit of my life? What does God want the fruit of my life to be? What needs to change? What needs to remain?

PRAYER

Jesus, you are the true vine – in the midst of all that is happening at the moment, help each of us to remain rooted in you. Give us the wisdom and courage to let go of those things that we need to release, the faith to believe that God's purposes cannot be thwarted by any earthly circumstance. Help us to live lives that bear the fruit of your indwelling and be present in this world through us we pray. AMEN