

25 April 2021 – ANZAC Day

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 23 (responsively from The Message)

God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

**You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.**

True to your word,

you let me catch my breath

and send me in the right direction.

**Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.**

Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.

**You serve me a banquet dinner
right in front of my enemies.**

You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.

**Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.**

I'm at home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.

John 15:1-17

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.'

John 15 – staying connected with Jesus

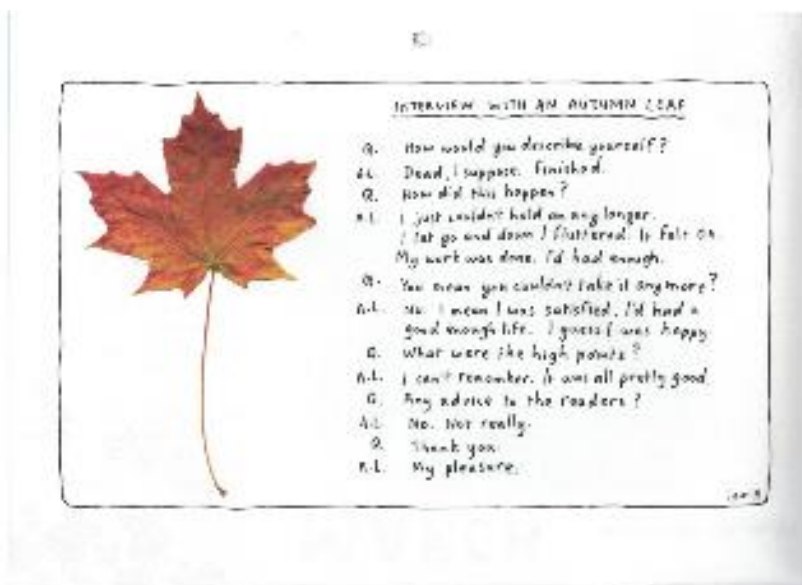
At home we have several fruit trees – three apple trees and also plum, lemon and lime trees. One of my jobs each winter is to prune these trees.

I find it a somewhat nerve-wracking job ... I want to keep the trees a reasonable size so we can net them in summer ... but I also want to shape the trees and prune off the growth that won't produce fruit ... and all the time thinking that I'm cutting off so many healthy branches that it seems a bit mean to the trees.



I do wonder how all those chopped off branches feel ...

Well, cartoonist Michael Leunig hints at some sort of answer as he interviews an autumn leaf that just couldn't hold on any more.



So I have some sympathy when Jesus says 'I am the true vine and my father is the vinegrower'. This is the seventh and final of the 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel, which each

indicate an important aspect of what Jesus has come to communicate. This final 'I am' saying is part of Jesus' long farewell address that supposedly occurs after the Last Supper and takes up several chapters in this Gospel, leading directly into the arrest of Jesus. These chapters in John typically feature in the lectionary during the Easter season. The message in today's passage is both an **invitation** and a **warning**.

- It's an **invitation** to an intimate, ongoing and mutual relationship with God through Jesus the Son ... a relationship that involves love, joy and life.
- But it's also a **warning** that this relationship can't be taken for granted, lest it wither and become unfruitful.

Despite its setting, these words appear to be written to address certain challenges faced by the later church. John's community are struggling with their identity as followers of Jesus after being thrown out of the Jewish synagogue ... and John is remembering and recrafting Jesus' words to speak a message of hope and encouragement in this new context.

Let's look at the passage in some more detail ...

when Jesus says he is the **true vine**, he is alluding to the common metaphor in the Hebrew Scriptures where Israel is compared to a vine or a vineyard ... a



vineyard that has failed to produce Godly fruit of justice and righteousness in Isaiah 5 and which thus gets trampled by the nations in Psalm 80. In comparison to Israel, Jesus is the **true** vine ... the source of a **renewed** Israel who will produce the sort of fruit God desires ... justice, love and obedience.

God is portrayed as the **vinegrower** and the Christian community are the **branches** of the vine. In order to produce fruit they must remain in the vine, that is, firmly attached to Jesus. The obvious point that John is making is that the community can only bear fruit if it remains tightly connected



with Jesus. So the branches must **abide** in the vine, an evocative word that might also be translated as stay, remain, dwell, lodge or persist. This abiding has a **mutual** sense ... the community abides in Jesus just as Jesus abides in them. This abiding is not static ... but rather dynamic, living, growing - and capable of producing fruit - hence the image of the vine.

Other similar NT images

Being yoked together with Christ (Matt 11:28-30)

Living or walking 'in Christ' (commonly in Paul's writings)

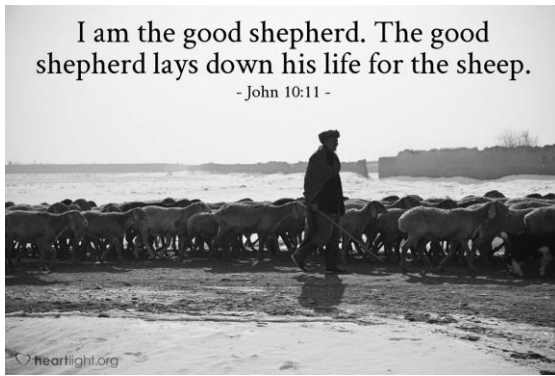
The aim of abiding in Jesus is to produce the fruit that God desires – especially mutual love - which, according to Jesus, is impossible unless the community remains intimately connected to Jesus.

As the church community lives out the command to **love one another as Jesus has loved us** – as exemplified in the cross - two things happen:

- God is revealed and made known - and thus glorified
- The whole community of disciples experience the deep joy of sharing life with one another and living in communion with God

How does this call to love one another fit in with our reflection on ANZAC Day and also the other passage set down for today which is Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep in his flock?





Jesus says that the greatest love is to lay down one's life for one's friends. This is what Jesus does as the **Good Shepherd** – allowing us to enjoy what Jesus calls the abundant life, a life lived in communion with God and with one another.



It's the sort of love that many parents – and especially **mothers** - show for their children – which we will remember in a couple of weeks' time on Mother's Day.



And it's the love for our country Australia that the service and sacrifice of our **soldiers** fighting overseas is supposed to point us to – a love so strong that these mostly men were prepared to lay down their lives so we could continue to enjoy a life of freedom and safety.

And this is where the ANZAC myth doesn't quite all hang together for me. How does serving our country justify bombing, killing and maiming thousands of innocent people in other countries? What do the actions of our troops teach these people about God's love and the love of our supposedly Christian country?



It suggests to me a warped notion of love and service that seem more akin to survival of the fittest or even schoolyard bullying. I will come here to your country and kill you so that you can't come and kill people in our country. And if you do try coming to our country, especially as a refugee, you will not be welcome.



Political motives and goals quickly become very murky, leading Australia to participate in intractable wars in places like Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. When the fighting and killing becomes endless, our politicians pull the plug and leave the country concerned in a devastated condition. So why are our soldiers lifted up as heroes to be worshipped on what our Prime Minister Scott Morrison calls 'the most sacred day of the year'?

Courage, willingness to serve and sacrifice are all admirable qualities, but for Christians **love** is the central command ... love for God and love for one another, including love for our neighbour. This is the fruit that will last. This is the fruit that will bring joy to our lives. This is the sign of deep friendship. This is the example Jesus offers and calls us to embody. Love even for our enemies. This is the enduring message of Jesus.

Early in John's Gospel, we are told that God so **loved** the world that God **sent Jesus** to reveal God's grace and truth. After the resurrection account, **Jesus** in turn **sends the disciples** into the world in the power of God's Spirit so that others may also come to know the love and joy of relationship with God. This remains our mission and our purpose in the world, supported by our worship and our care for one another that leads to joy.

But there's only one way that this works ... whether as a community of followers of Jesus – or as parents – or as a supposedly Christian country – that we dwell and abide and grow in Jesus the true vine – even as Jesus abides in God's love - and as Jesus lives and grows in the midst of our community – only then we will experience the abundant life and joy that Jesus speaks about.

We will now sing the song *Brother, sister, let me serve you*

a song that asks us ...

...to be vulnerable and admit our need of each other's help

... that calls us to reach out with love and peace

... to share our joys and sorrows together

... that learns from the example of Jesus' love

and so truly commit to loving one another ...

