

THE 'I AM'S' OF JESUS

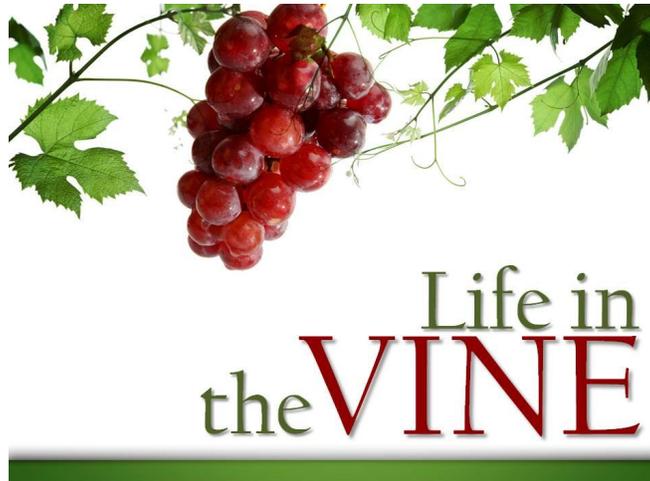
Part 8

I AM THE VINE

Based on the book: "The Great I Am's of Jesus."

By Anthony Coniaris, Light and Life Publications

Someone was once taking a walk through a park. As they were walking they noticed a branch of lilac that had broken off and lay at a distance from the lilac bush. Interestingly, this branch was lying there... but still had flowers blossoming on it. The person went closer to see what was going on. They noticed that there was a thin sliver of stem still connecting this branch with the parent bush. The branch had a connection. It was receiving strength and nourishment from the bush.



Our Lord Jesus Christ uses similar imagery to help us understand the importance of staying connected to the source of life that is God. He said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:1-4)

This simple imagery, was a way to relate to his listeners, listeners who belonged to a world where almost the entire economy was agricultural, farming, food production. This imagery would have been very clear for our grandparents and even our parents who grew up and lived in countryside villages. But for us moderns who only ever get food from a fridge or a shelf; for us moderns who have not got a clue how to cultivate basic produce, we need to try a little harder to try and understand the meaning of what is being said.

The first point that needs explaining. Jesus Christ said, “Abide in me and I in you”. He did not say ‘abide *next* to me’... he did not say ‘abide *on* me’... he said ‘abide *in* me’. The word ‘*in*’ signifies more than connection, more than friendship, more than affiliation. It signifies *oneness, becoming one, union and communion*. Our Tradition uses the biblical term “the life in Christ” to describe our faith and life. We don’t like using the word *religion*, which hardly appears in the Bible at all. And when it does, it usually refers to pagan or tribal religion. We say *our faith*, [η πίστη μας], we say, *our church* [η εκκλησία μας], we say *our life in Christ* [η ζωή εν Χριστώ]. This term, “in Christ”, is used in the Bible 164 times.

To say that I live *the life in Christ* means that I have become one with the source. I have become a branch on the vine. I have a vital source of contact with Christ God from which I receive life and energy. I live in Christ like a cell lives in the body to which it belongs. Through *metanoia* and change of my ways [repentance] I am grafted back onto the vine. The vital nutrients that flow into me are expressed and lived by what we do every Sunday, Holy Communion, drinking of the fruit of the vine, the blood of Life flowing in our veins. “*I live..., no longer I, but Christ lives in me*” says the Apostle Paul.



If we drive along the road what do we see? We can see trees and we can see electrical poles. Both have a wooden trunk. Trees are alive and green and beautiful. Poles are dead, and grey and ugly. The trees have tapped into an unseen source of nourishment and life in the earth. The electrical poles can be taken as a symbol of our domination of the earth... we have stabbed into it and chained it up with deadly black wires. The question we need to ask ourselves is which side am I on? In the battle between good and evil, which side am I on? Do I want to be a branch on the vine of life or a cog, a screw in a heartless and cold machine of money-making?

Which ironically brings me to the next little detail in Jesus Christ's words. *"Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, is taken away, and every branch that does bear fruit, is pruned, that it may bear more fruit."* If you leave a grape-vine alone, it will grow a lot of leaves, but not much fruit. The vine grows two kinds of branches, one kind grows grapes and the other kind grows only leaves. The vinedresser cuts off the branches that bear leaves only, so that they may not drain away energy and nourishment from the branches that bear grapes.



So it is with us. How many things are there that we do in our lives that do nothing but drain our energy? We are active, we are busy, we run around like madmen, our life is a veritable rat race. But we need to ask ourselves... what are we busy about? One can be busy with something to the neglect of something more important. Work over family, business over home, money over spirit. Sure, all the branches may bear leaves, but not all bear fruit. And therefore the need to prune away, to jettison, to let go, to renounce and reject whatever is spiritually unfruitful.

Jesus Christ said,

"I am the vine" [εγώ ειμί η άμπελος].

I am your most vital source of strength. In me you will find sufficiency and completeness. In me you will find power [δύναμις].

"You are the branches." [υμείς εστέ τα κλήματα]

Through you I bear rich fruit in the world.

"My Father is the farmer." [ο πατήρ μου ο γεωργός εστίν]

God is at work in our lives pruning away things that sap our strength, pruning away things that were not good for us, giving us the opportunity for new beginnings and new, better life.

Amen.

Next week, we shall continue with part 9 of our series on the "I AMs of Jesus".

We shall be talking about "I am the Alpha and the Omega" - Εγώ ειμί το άλφα και το ωμέγα.

You can catch up with the series on Twitter. Follow us @stgeorgerosebay.

*Sermon delivered by Fr Gerasimos Koutsouras
St George Church, Rose Bay, Australia
Sunday, 7th of April 2013*