

“Remain in Me”

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John 15.1-8
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Jesus uses a simile to talk about himself: “I am the true vine,” and “my father is the farmer.” The image of the vineyard or vine is a 5compares Israel to a vineyard or vine cultivated by God. The people of God are supposed to be planted to bear fruit for the nations and yet, no matter how much God strives to do so, they fail to bear the fruits expected of them.

In Jeremiah 2:21 we find this strong tirade from God against Israel: “I planted you with a choice vine, all of it good seed; how then have you become a branch of a strange vine to me?” The same lesson appears in the book of the prophet Isaiah with his “song of the vineyard” (5:1-7). It seems that God's people, despite all that their God has done for them, are not capable of living up to the level of divine expectations.

In this context of infidelity, Jesus presents himself as the “true vine”), not as one more, but as the “true” one, concentrating in himself the virtues that have not been found in the people as a whole. Jesus represents everything that Israel has not been able to incorporate into its lifestyle. Jesus is the faithful one, the true one, the one who does the will of the Father who sent him (Jn 5:30), since seeing him is seeing the Father (Jn 14:9). Israel, on the contrary, the more luxuriant it was, the more fruit it dedicated to idols (Hos 10:1). This statement by Jesus is loaded with a deep meaning, which reminds us of the faithfulness of the God who now becomes human, who has prepared his tabernacle among us (Jn 1:14).

In this beautiful image of Jesus as a vine and the Father as a farmer, Jesus takes upon himself those who remain in him, while the Father's work is to provide the branches with the greatest possibilities of being what they were created for: to carry much fruit (v. 8).

The intimate relationship between Jesus and the disciples, who believe and put their trust in Jesus, is such that they are part of the same group. Jesus is the fundamental nucleus that gives life to the branches.

But what happens when they don't bear the expected fruit? Is God willing to give the branch another chance? In John, judgment has to do with the position that people take for or against Jesus as Messiah. That is why it makes sense to interpret that the parable does not speak of judgment, but rather shows us the reality of things from Jesus' point of view. You can try to live a "good life" on your own merits, but from Jesus' point of view you can only live this "good life" in "permanence" with him.

The "good life" is one that bears the expected fruits (by God) and is nothing other than living humanly in fidelity to how we have been created. Israel, in the past, tried it with its forces and failed miserably. He wanted to be an example, but he became the same or worse than his neighbors.

"Apart from me you cannot bear fruit" (v. 4), Jesus warns. When we as a church try to live according to our own strength, we can fall into the danger of never changing anyone's heart. Only by remaining in a relationship of dependence and intimate relationship with Jesus can we live fruitfully. That life gives glory to God, because in our dependence we admit the greatness of the creator and the farmer who cares for us and cleanses us so that we can be everything for which we have been created.

The image of branches depending on the sap of the vine that is Jesus the Christ is a precious reminder that we have been created, whether we are believers or not, to live in intimate communion with the creator of heaven and earth.

His will and desire is that we keep his commandments (v. 10) is not a call to legalism but a specification that God has manifested to his people from the beginning: "You will therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45).

This is an invitation to dependence and a deeper experience of His provision, comfort and help in times of difficulty. When we are fully human (like Jesus), our lives bear fruit and glorify God, and we are his disciples and followers. Everything else is rubbish.