

Prayer: God, you are the vine grower. We are the branches. Help us abide in Jesus the Christ, your true vine, so that we may bear much fruit. Grant that we may live productively in faith, sharing your good news and welcoming all who seek into the life you so generously give. Amen.

I gave up this week, I changed the sermon title, the one we are supposed to have is 'No need to live an impoverished life'. Instead we have 'changing headings— because as I worked with the title and scriptures – it seemed to me that a more true response would be reflected in 'Changing headings as our theme. I want to suggest before exploring the scriptures more; that in my new title, I mean both how we change the heading of what we do **externally** in our lives as the scriptures take hold in us, and how we change the heading inside us of the priorities / interests / passions & motivations that drive us, *daily living in Js*.

If we start where we were told to: there is 'no need to live an impoverished life' – I have found it too full of assumptions to have any merit for us, except – **except** that as I *already have a faith* – I have, as a part of my understanding, anyone living 'outside' of a faith based life to be impoverished! And everyone with a faith base to their living is indeed 'rich' – and obviously I have a strong bias towards Christianity. Being able to base our lives in faith makes us rich!

BUT if we stop at / on the 'base point' – there is no increase in our wealth, there is no return on our investment, there is no product – no productivity – and today's scripture would imply there is no life. We know that John's Gospel today says that for those in Jesus, our value is because we are loved, we are included, grafted into the spirit flow of YHWH God through Jesus, through us into the world. It is all in the 'present' ^{*2} / the "now" so it is a/ the process of **being alive today!** I think most – if not **all** of us here experienced in one way or another what it is to be a part of something more than us; something richer and stronger than the 'self' on its own... we know it... **and** we know when it is **not happening**. cV

Today the scripture is quite ruthless, hard hearted, cruel – when belonging / being a part is not happening then you are useless – of no value and have to be cut off, bound together and burnt – so that perhaps as you die you may be of some use through the power of fire! But to make this the focus of the message of today would be to bend the teachings before us. Jesus wasn't teaching so much on what happened if you removed yourself, got cut off from him / left the Christian faith – that is of course a poor choice! Rather this passage is part of a much longer series of leaving words of encouragement from Jesus to his disciples – when he knew he was going to die; about choices without him around!

The focus is not about making *poor* choices that only make your life poorer / more impoverished, rather Jesus is teaching about how **when we stay** in him – our lives only get better. **BUT** we **have to stay in** him, and **stay alive** and growing – and doing and being productive. **Only** by staying in him is this teaching; **only** in him is the return on his investment made, **only** in him is true wealth found – because it's all about productivity – work / fruit bearing for him and his ways... And yes it is all about hard work. cV

It is hard work on our 'internal' development – our faith growth, our understandings of the scriptures and changing how we live **from the inside out**. This 'internal' work is hard – and it ends when we die - as far as we can tell!!!! This is the work of rearranging our priorities to be in complete alignment with Jesus, the changing of the ranking of our most 'wanted' dreams and as Jesus scriptures flow through us and allowing his spirit to cleanse, and heal, to fix up and enrich our lives. Changing our ways into Jesus ways – inside us makes us rich and productive! cV

Because I've never know any other way – I understand it is Jesus spirit at work teaching about the difference in what it means to be 'rich'. Jesus told a couple of stories to make us think about what was important and being rich was all about according to him. The best today is about the man who made so much money he had to keep building bigger barns to hold his produce, promising that *one day* he would

give to God what was God's; *one day* he would straighten his priorities to fit with his religion / *one day* he'd do it 'God's way'. **Only he died** – not only did he not have the joy of being right / clean / productive (internal wealth) with God for his work, BUT neither did he have his money, his external wealth. He was impoverished – and he had no need to be! cV

I wonder if Jesus was hinting at an attitude we still have about being 'rich', that somehow being in Jesus / being a Jesus follower, means you can't have monetary wealth / external wealth. *And that* Jesus commands you to give it all away and money is bad kind of thinking. What rubbish – ***in one sense***. Jesus wants everyone of us to be '**clean**' inside and out, to be **productive** – inside and out, to live – be **alive** because of his spirit / sap flowing through our veins and hearts and his word nourishing our souls and minds.... So **whatever** it is that is **blocking** his ways to flow in our lives he commands us to get rid of, so it might not be money – it might be a 'friend', it might be a possession, it might be an attitude, it is **anything that blocks him!** Because whatever is blocking him from flowing freely through us kills!

So yes, it is hard work **changing** our priorities to line up with his, do the work; change our thinking to his thinking; to accept as part of this internal work he will help by removing non-productive / dead / unclean habits / thoughts / dreams. Do *we really* respect something that is easy? Living in the 'Vine' *called Jesus* is hard – had ruthless bits – never ends with its challenges – but it's the richest form of living I know.

Whether we hold our wealth in money, or knowledge or love or family.... The changing of our internal priorities and bringing them into Jesus and accepting his 'editing process' has an effect on our external life. It might be for instance – that once making money (like Jesus rich man and his barns) was everything to you – but after Jesus has grafted you into him / attached you to the 'Vine', making money is even better because it is now for Jesus and his ministry. It could be anything in your life that you love doing – when we are 'plugged' into the Vine (grafted!)– it changes things because of Jesus, the life, flowing through us and it is living productively!

Today's story from Acts is a good illustration of how Jesus changes your life. We had Philip, a disciple called to be 'present' at a particular spot on a road. It can read as if there is a chariot parked and a man in it reading scripture. It was normal for him to be reading aloud, and so Philip starts talking to him. **"Do you understand?"** The man replies – **How can I, unless someone explains it to me?** So Philip does and talks about Jesus – the good news of Jesus and with his growing understanding the man asks for baptism – is baptised, Philip is released and the man goes home. cV

I imagine that before Jesus came into Philip's life he had no idea of the kind of lifestyle he would lead. It is certainly not boring with unchanging daily patterns! In obedience to the flow of the Spirit of Jesus Philip starts in the north – then has to go south of Jerusalem and then he's off to Azotus... And in the middle he produces the gentle words of explanation to the Ethiopian eunuch which are so productive!

Maybe it was his inclusive attitude, eunuch's were a marginalised group in society, not allowed to enter the temple he had come to worship in! – Maybe it was Philip's acceptance of a faith seeker irrespective of background – an Ethiopian gentile. Maybe it was Philip's knowledge of who he was talking about... Maybe Philip was just being himself and doing what he loved doing for Jesus - and this small, almost simple act changed the course of history. ^{*1}There is still a major Christian church in Ethiopia which traces its roots to this event.

Being productive for Jesus – bearing fruit and explaining the how and the why to other seekers is what Jesus asks. Maybe we need to remember ^{*3} Sarah Henrich's advice: "Bearing fruit does not create disciples," she writes; "bearing fruit reveals disciples. Both of these activities are dependent on abiding in Jesus, the real vine." Common roots – the same Vine – you and I, Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, Jesus said – stay with me and you will be productive; you will bear fruit, - you will be mine and live. Live with Jesus and accept the constant change of life's headings – both internally and externally because nothing else will ever be so enriching! Amen