



# Church in a Bag

## Sunday 2 May

Dubbo Uniting Church



### A Gathering

Loving God, we come to reconnect to you, the source of love.

God lives in us.

Grafted again to the taproot of love in this time of worship  
we strengthen ourselves to reach out like branches  
bearing good fruit to the world.

We choose to stop

and give God the reverence and awe God deserves.

As we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord

we ask for a sense of joy as we worship God

to give thanks for Jesus Christ

and to witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Abide with us in this time, O God

so that we will continue to abide in love now and always.

Amen.



### Preparation

In Jesus' analogy, he likened himself to a vine, while the fruit bearing branches here are the disciples. God the farmer is depicted as the one who cultivates the vineyard. God waters and tends the soil, so that the vine is properly nourished. God takes pride in the crop. But this means that God also prunes the vines and removes the dead wood. The grapes hang on to the branches. Can you name for yourself five different ways you use your gifts and abilities to bless other people? Can you remember the last time you helped someone else and gave the glory to God? What personal gifts (abilities) could you encourage this week in someone else?

## Reading: John 15:1-8

### Reflection

Jesus was not introducing a new idea by using the metaphor of a vine and branches. In the Old Testament, God's vine was Israel. Jesus is the true Vine. In Scripture, the word *true* is often used to describe what is eternal, heavenly, and divine. Israel was imperfect, but Christ is perfect.



Jesus chose the figure of a vine for several reasons. The lowliness of a vine demonstrates His humility. It also pictures a close, permanent, vital union between the vine and branches. It is symbolic of belonging, because branches belong entirely to the vine; if branches are to live and bear fruit, they must completely depend on the vine for nourishment, support, strength, and vitality.

Yet many Christians fail to depend on Christ. Instead of being attached to the true vine, they are tied to a bank account, or knowing it all or popularity, fame, possessions, relationship status, or fleshly desires. But none of those things can sustain or bear fruit.

The vine is Christ. Fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing branches grow rapidly and must be carefully pruned. If there is to be a large quantity of fruit, the fruitless branches must be removed, as well as the shoots that grow on the fruit-bearing branches. In first-century Palestine, it was common to prevent a vine from bearing fruit for three years after it was planted. In the fourth year it was strong enough to bear fruit. Its fruit-bearing capacity had been increased by the careful pruning. Mature branches, which had already been through the four-year process, were pruned annually. Jesus said His followers were like mature branches that bore fruit but needed pruning. There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. Every Christian bears some fruit - if you look enough, you will find something.

It is the essence of the Christian life to bear fruit. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His people, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The fruit of salvation is good works. James 2:17 explains the close relationship between faith and works:

"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." If our saving faith is legitimate, it produces fruit. That does not mean a person is saved by works, but works are evidence that faith is genuine.

Also, Jesus said a genuine believer can be tested by his fruit. In Matthew 7:16-17 He said, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from the thistles, are they? So *every* good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit". Jesus' illustration would make no sense if every Christian did not bear at least some fruit. The pruning process can hurt, but the fruit is well worth it and not just for us but everyone around us. Love God, love your neighbour as you love yourself.

## Prayer of Confession (The pruning- ouch!)

There are only two feelings. Love and fear.

There are only two languages. Love and fear.

There are only two activities. Love and fear.

There are only two motives, two procedures, two frameworks, two results.  
Love and fear.

God, help us to find our confession; the truth within us which is hidden from our mind; the beauty or ugliness we see elsewhere but never in ourselves; the stowaway which has been smuggled into the dark side of the heart, which puts the heart off balance and causes it pain, which wearies and confuses us, which tips us in false directions and inclines us to destruction, the load which is not carried squarely because it is carried in ignorance.

God help us to find our confession and lay it down. Help us across the boundary of our understanding. Lead us into the darkness that we may find what lies concealed; that we may confess it towards the light; that we may carry our truth in the centre of our heart; that we may carry our cross wisely and bring harmony into our life and our world.

Amen

## Words of Affirmation

We are the branches that seek to glorify God, to bear much fruit, to witness to God's love revealed among us, to reveal the fullness of a life lived with compassion, devoid of fear and hate. We leave all impoverishment here and are blessed in joy, for the spirit of the loving God abides with us this day and evermore. In Jesus Christ we are loved, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

## A song to sing or to read: You Raise Me Up

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary  
when troubles come and my heart burdened be  
then, I am still and wait here in the silence  
until You come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders  
You raise me up to more than I can be

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### Closing Prayer – “We are part of the vine”

Great Gardener of heavenly vines, in the activity of every day there are signs of Your kingdom growing. As people of faith, we offer compassion and encouragement that allow others to flourish. So we thank you for the buds that bloom within our lives. In the midst of the buds, we place our prayers. Prayers of our hopes for leadership, within our church, our community, our country and our world. Prayers of our compassion, that look at the world and the places in need of care. Our prayers of love, where we wrestle with the hurt, sickness and loneliness of those we know and those we meet in the news.

Here in the vine of worship we bring our prayers to nestle in your branches, where we might allow them to be trimmed, shaped, watered and nourished - until they speak of the Kingdom of Heaven reaching into all of life in Christ’s name.

Amen

**With thanks to Rev Mel Graham for preparing today’s reflection**



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