

Attending to Vines: A Primer

John 14-15 describes events within 24 hours of Jesus' crucifixion.

PART ONE: PRACTICE PAYING ATTENTION

1. John 15 assumes a world full of metaphor that requires paying attention.

God's fingerprints are over everything he has made. He is often at work drawing our attention to beauty.

For the wellspring of life is with you. By means of your light we see light. Psalm 36:9

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." C.S. Lewis

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard. Their message has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun. Psalm 19:1-4

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36 (see also Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 2:10).

Every atom and molecule is created, on the contrary, to receive and display the beauty and glory of God. Jonathan Edwards

2. Imitate Jesus' way of seeing things.

There is mystery and extraordinary in the seeming ordinary.

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Lee*

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with him. He walks everywhere incognito. And the incognito is not always hard to penetrate. The real labor is to remember, to attend ... in fact to come awake. Still more, to remain awake." – C.S. Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

"The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder." G.K. Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles

PART TWO: OBSERVING A VINE

Vinedressing is at least as old as Noah. (Genesis 9:20)

Vines and branches share common DNA, but behave differently.

- A branch disconnected from the vine is dead.
- Good vinedressers pay attention because they care.
- That care involves pruning.
- That care requires wisdom to get conditions just right.

For a 1st century Palestinian, the vine is a metaphor signifying Israel itself.

Israel is frequently represented as a vine or a vineyard. This is a meaningful layer to the disciples.

I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one's vineyard: The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He broke up the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower in the middle of it and even dug out a winepress there. He expected it to yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes. So now, residents of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes? Now I will tell you what I am about to do to my vineyard: I will remove its hedge, and it will be consumed; I will tear down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland. It will not be pruned or weeded; thorns and briers will grow up. I will also give orders to the clouds that rain should not fall on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant he delighted in. He expected justice but saw injustice; he expected righteousness but heard cries of despair. Isaiah 5:1-7 (see also Psalm 80:8-11; Judges 9:13, Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10-13, Ezekiel 15:1-5, 17:1-21; 19:10-15, Isaiah 27:2-3, Hosea 10:1-2)

Every instance when Israel is depicted in the Old Testament as a vine or vineyard, the nation is set under the judgment of God for its corruption, sometimes explicitly for its failure to produce good fruit. It's connected to all that Jesus says about vines and vineyards and fig trees in vineyards.

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree that was planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He told the vineyard worker, 'Listen, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it even waste the soil?' "But he replied to him, 'Sir, leave it this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. Perhaps it will produce fruit next year, but if not, you can cut it down.'" Luke 13:6-9 (see also Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-25)

Pay attention with Jesus.