

Devotional blog

To bear fruit, get connected

Have you been to Hampton Court Palace recently to see the Tulip Festival? The tulips in the garden are stunning. The variety is countless. Though I haven't been there to see it in full swing, I detoured and walked past the beautiful Tulips on display outside the main gate one afternoon.

Without a second thought, I took my smart phone out to capture the beauty of their vibrant colours and shape. On my screen, I saw something wasn't right. Then I took a closer look.

Ahh.. the colour of one tulip was fading. When I looked at it again, I found that its brittle stem was broken. It would soon be withered and discarded without reaching its full bloom.

Likewise, Jesus uses the true vine and the branches referring to and affirming his intimate relationship with his disciples in John 15:1-8. I particularly love the Message version that tells us that abiding with Jesus is like making our home in him in verse 4.

"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. (John 15:4 The Message)

All these happen as part of Jesus' farewell discourses before going to the cross. In his final words, he refers to himself as the true vine. And within Jewish tradition, the vine is a picture of Israel which God brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in the promised land (Psalm 80:8-18).

Before them and all unbearable departure and death, Jesus proclaims he is the true Israel. He is himself as Israel-in-person, and his followers as members of God's family because they belong to him. This intimate relationship with him will sustain his followers and allow them to be true to themselves. Furthermore the relationship cultivates us to our full potential as a genuine human being to love and be loved without fear.

However, if the branches decide to go alone, and try to live without the life of the vine, just like the tulip with the broken stem, they will soon discover their mistake. They are good for nothing but the fire (verse 6).

The question for us is this, how do we remain in him? What does it look like in practice?

We must remain in the community, the body of Christ that knows and loves Jesus and celebrates him as their living Lord, for there is no such thing as a 'Lone Ranger Christian'.

What's more, we must remain as people of prayer and worship so that we are in tune, with Jesus, knowing him and being known by him day by day.

It may come at a time when the Vinegrower's pruning knife is at work. We trust that it helps to cut away other goals and ambitions of our own. That being so, we can truly reach our full bloom and bear fruit for his glory.

To bear fruit or any have any productively in life, we need to get connected with Jesus who loves us to the uttermost and restore all our brokenness on the cross. We need to stay connected in the body of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit who is sent in his name Jesus, we will gradually bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23 NRSV) in our daily living. Amen.

Short reflection

- What is the time in your life that you are bearing fruit?
- In what "fruits" do you need to grow? How are you going to do that?
- What transformation have you witnessed in your life from being connected to the Body of Christ?