

Easter 5 Sermon 2021 – **‘Quality not Quantity’** from Fr. Mike

- [Acts 8. 26-40](#)
- [Psalm 22.25-31](#)
- [1 John 4.7-21](#)
- [John 15.1-8](#)

Productivity is the basis of our economic system. For the most part, the yardstick of our lives and the measure of our success also tends to be about ‘productivity.’ Those who produce are rewarded and get more. In contrast, those who do not produce are thrown out.

Within our educational system the students who do well and ‘produce’ are recognised, supported and valued by society, whereas those who do not produce the goods inevitably get lost in the system. Even professors know well the mantra, ‘publish or perish.’ Many careers and promotions are based on levels of productivity. At some level, productivity is at the very core of debates around poverty, welfare, healthcare, and the elderly. These vulnerable people are not always seen as able to ‘produce’ and our subsequent care for them, together with the way society treats these groups, often reflects our individual and collective attitudes.

Many have been convinced (seduced?) into believing that productivity is the goal, and that only the ‘most fit’ will succeed and survive.

How many of us live our spiritual lives in this fashion? How many of us have either been told, come to accept or to believe that pruned branches go to heaven and removed branches go to hell? Pruned branches are rewarded (because they produced) whereas non-productive branches are punished – **‘cast forth...into the fire, and they are burned’** as St. John seemingly points out. If we are not careful, we fall foul of the first trap – we get stuck categorising ourselves and one another into ‘fruit bearing’ or ‘non-fruit bearing’ branches.

**There is, however, a deeper issue than the production of fruit.**

Productivity does not usually create deep, abiding, or intimate relationships. It creates transactions. Jesus is not talking about or demanding productivity. He wants and offers something much more three-dimensional; namely connectivity, relationship and intimacy.

Fruit (or the lack of it) is a manifestation of our interior life and health. It describes and reveals whether we are living connected or disconnected lives. Fruit production is the natural consequence of staying connected. Evidence for this remark can be found in long-term friendships, marriages, and/or community loyalty. We do not choose whether or not we produce fruit. We do, however, choose where we **‘abide’** and how we stay connected.

## How important is the requirement to 'abide'?

Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, we lose touch with a particular person.

We no longer know where he or she is, what they are doing, or what is currently happening in their life. One day, we suddenly bump into him or her again. At this point it is a bit awkward. Initially, neither person is sure what to say or how to react. There is not much to talk about. No immediate or perceivable common ground. No deep abiding presence. The connection is lost, and it seems in that brief moment that all that existed in the past has been thrown away. Other people we run into again after five or ten years. On these occasions of reunion the conversation immediately picks up where we left off all those years ago. Even though we were apart, we never *really* left one another. There was a strong connection that persisted. A mutual abiding of that time and distance, which circumstances of life cannot sever.

John's letter to us puts it this way – **'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'** (v.10).

## Questions for today?

"What fruit am I producing?" "How much?" "Is it an acceptable quality?"

All good questions if we ask them diagnostically – as questions not about the **quantity** of our lives but the **quality** of our lives. That is what I suspect Jesus is

after when he says in the Gospel **'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.'** (v8) This deeper question about **quality** is what he asks of you and me today. We are being invited to join the conversation, jump into the game, to participate, and to be fully alive. That only happens when the life, the love, goodness and holiness of Christ flows in us. We become an extension of Jesus as we manifest His life, His love, and His holiness in the nature of our life. **'He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.'** (v.5)

It is a relationship of union as a branch is united to the vine. As Christians, we all live our lives as one.

This is not simply about our relationship with Jesus; it affects, and is the basis for, our relationships with one another. Love for Jesus, love for one another, and love for ourselves ***become the same thing*** - (as Bob Marley fans will already know) – namely 'one love!' **'as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself.'**

We soon discover, both individually and collectively, that we are living one life, and the fruit of that common life and love is abundant, overflowing, and ultimately glorifies God the Father once these key words from our Lord are imbibed: **'if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you...'** (v.7). Amen!

Fr. Mike (Easter 5) 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021