



Weekly Reflection on The Semi-Circle

Well, as I write this I have been delighted by the conversation and discussion that has taken place in various ways about the Triangle. I am constantly amazed and intrigued by the very many ways people connect with each other at St Paul's!

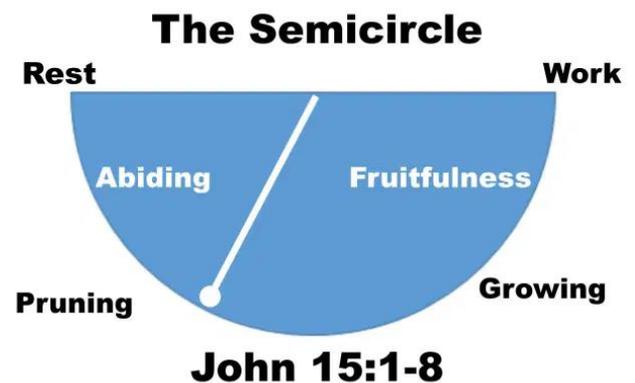
So when we consider our personal practices, the idea is to make sure that we are working in all three corners/directions of the Triangle. It is easy to be good at one or two but being able to be growing in all three corners...that requires energy and focus.

Now, at this point, I want to introduce the semi-circle – think here of the movement of a pendulum swing. Here is the main bible text to set the context, from John 15.

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

So, the semi-circle of the pendulum swing teaches us that our movement begins from a place of rest and of abiding. However, we cannot stay there...the pendulum swings to work and then swings back to rest. Now, sometimes we spend too much time in the 'work' side and then crash into rest – that is not the path of flourishing and was not how you were made.

The steady swing of the pendulum invites us into a rhythm, which is expressed in



different expanses of time – the day, week, month, year and so on. We have discussed the ordering of time in previous reflections – for having times of solitude, prayer and rest which enables us to abide in the vine, Jesus.

Then we can't ignore the pruning bit – that sounds painful, doesn't it? In this gospel, God is the 'Vine Grower' who prunes us but not just for the sake of it, so that we will be more fruitful. Pruning can come in all shapes and sizes, indeed the toughest times can be a time of pruning – feeling abandoned, hurt, excluded, rejected or unworthy may accompany such times – things happen to us, often difficult, where things are stripped back. COVID-19 might feel like that – I find some things to do with COVID-19 to be painful...and yet I am confident there is there will be growth in unexpected ways. The same is true for the church – there are things which grow but we are still called to prune so that we can be more fruitful.

Entering rest is also a time when we draw a line and say, 'I won't be doing any of that while I rest' and when we return to it, our energy and perspective will no doubt be better. I am reminded of Stephen Covey, author of '*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,' who lists the Seventh Habit as one of 'Sharpening the Saw', he said

"We must never become too busy sawing to take time to sharpen the saw."

The basic premise is that in order that we need time to be recreated – to invest in times of stepping aside and doing some deep interior work, so that our saw is sharp and can easily cut through the wood.

And then this leads to growth or fruitfulness – it may be messy and not linear, but the general trajectory is one of growth.

It is easy to fall into the trap of activity and 'doing good' but that engine will soon run out of gas. I want to suggest that we are called to be *contemplative activists*. Our times of rest and contemplation, using the spiritual practices we have explored before, lead us into taking action but it comes in that order – God's love washes over us and enables us to bear fruit that is part of God's reconciling, loving ministry to a broken world.